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MEDEA

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CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

MEDEA, *daughter of Aiêtês, King of Colchis.*

JASON, *chief of the Argonauts; nephew of Pelias, King of Iôlcos in Thessaly.*

CREON, *ruler of Corinth.*

AEGEUS, *King of Athens.*

NURSE of Medea.

TWO CHILDREN of Jason and Medea.

ATTENDANT on the children.

A MESSENGER.

CHORUS of Corinthian Women, with their LEADER.
Soldiers and Attendants.

The scene is laid in Corinth. The play was first acted when Pythodôrus was Archon, Olympiad 87, year 1 (B.C. 431). Euphorion was first, Sophocles second, Euripides third, with Medea, Philoctêtes, Dictys, and the Harvesters, a Satyr-play.

INTRODUCTION

THE *Medea*, in spite of its background of wonder and enchantment, is not a romantic play but a tragedy of character and situation. It deals, so to speak, not with the romance itself, but with the end of the romance, a thing which is so terribly often the reverse of romantic. For all but the very highest of romances are apt to have just one flaw somewhere, and in the story of Jason and Medea the flaw was of a fatal kind.

The wildness and beauty of the Argo legend run through all Greek literature, from the mass of Corinthian lays older than our present *Iliad*, which later writers vaguely associate with the name of Eumêlus, to the Fourth Pythian Ode of Pindar and the beautiful *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius. Our poet knows the wildness and the beauty; but it is not these qualities that he specially seeks. He takes them almost for granted, and pierces through them to the sheer tragedy that lies below.

Jason, son of Aeson, King of Iôlcus, in Thessaly, began his life in exile. His uncle Pelias had seized his father's kingdom, and Jason was borne away to the mountains by night and given, wrapped in a purple robe, to Chiron, the Centaur. When he

reached manhood he came down to Iôlcos to demand, as Pindar tells us, his ancestral honour, and stood in the market-place, a world-famous figure, one-sandalled, with his pard-skin, his two spears and his long hair, gentle and wild and fearless, as the Wise Beast had reared him. Pelias, cowed but loath to yield, promised to give up the kingdom if Jason would make his way to the unknown land of Colchis and perform a double quest. First, if I read Pindar aright, he must fetch back the soul of his kinsman Phrixus, who had died there far from home; and, secondly, find the fleece of the Golden Ram which Phrixus had sacrificed. Jason undertook the quest: gathered the most daring heroes from all parts of Hellas; built the first ship, Argo, and set to sea. After all manner of desperate adventures he reached the land of Aiêtês, king of the Colchians, and there hope failed him. By policy, by tact, by sheer courage he did all that man could do. But Aiêtês was both hostile and treacherous. The Argonauts were surrounded, and their destruction seemed only a question of days when, suddenly, unasked, and by the mercy of Heaven, Aiêtês' daughter, Mêdêa, an enchantress as well as a princess, fell in love with Jason. She helped him through all his trials; slew for him her own sleepless serpent, who guarded the fleece; deceived her father, and secured both the fleece and the soul of Phrixus. At the last moment it appeared that her brother, Absyrtus, was about to lay an ambush for Jason. She invited Absyrtus to her room, stabbed him dead, and fled

with Jason over the seas. She had given up all, and expected in return a perfect love.

And what of Jason? He could not possibly avoid taking Medea with him. He probably rather loved her. She formed at the least a brilliant addition to the glory of his enterprise. Not many heroes could produce a barbarian princess ready to leave all and follow them in blind trust. For of course, as every one knew without the telling in fifth-century Athens, no legal marriage was possible between a Greek and a barbarian from Colchis.

All through the voyage home, a world-wide baffled voyage by the Ister and the Eridanus and the African Syrtes, Medea was still in her element, and proved a constant help and counsellor to the Argonauts. When they reached Jason's home, where Pelias was still king, things began to be different. An ordered and law-abiding Greek state was scarcely the place for the untamed Colchian. We only know the catastrophe. She saw with smothered rage how Pelias hated Jason and was bent on keeping the kingdom from him, and she determined to do her lover another act of splendid service. Making the most of her fame as an enchantress, she persuaded Pelias that he could, by a certain process, regain his youth. He eagerly caught at the hope. His daughters tried the process upon him, and Pelias died in agony. Surely Jason would be grateful now!

The real result was what it was sure to be in a civilised country. Medea and her lover had to fly

for their lives, and Jason was debarred for ever from succeeding to the throne of Iôlcos. Probably there was another result also in Jason's mind : the conclusion that at all costs he must somehow separate himself from this wild beast of a woman who was ruining his life. He directed their flight to Corinth, governed at the time by a ruler of some sort, whether "tyrant" or king, who was growing old and had an only daughter. Creon would naturally want a son-in-law to support and succeed him. And where in all Greece could he find one stronger or more famous than the chief of the Argonauts? If only Medea were not there! No doubt Jason owed her a great debt for her various services. Still, after all, he was not married to her. And a man must not be weak in such matters as these. Jason accepted the princess's hand, and when Medea became violent, found it difficult to be really angry with Creon for instantly condemning her to exile. At this point the tragedy begins.

The *Medea* is one of the earliest of Euripides' works now preserved to us. And those of us who have in our time glowed at all with the religion of realism, will probably feel in it many of the qualities of youth. Not, of course, the more normal, sensuous, romantic youth, the youth of *Romeo and Juliet*; but another kind—crude, austere, passionate—the youth of the poet who is also a sceptic and a devotee of truth, who so hates the conventionally and falsely beautiful that he is apt to be unduly ascetic towards beauty itself. When a writer really deficient in poetry walks in this

path, the result is purely disagreeable. It produces its best results when the writer, like Euripides or Tolstoy, is so possessed by an inward flame of poetry that it breaks out at the great moments and consumes the cramping theory that would hold it in. One can feel in the *Medea* that the natural and inevitable romance of the story is kept rigidly down. One word about Medea's ancient serpent, two or three references to the Clashing Rocks, one startling flash of light upon the real love of Jason's life, love for the ship Argo, these are almost all the concessions made to us by the merciless delineator of disaster into whose hands we are fallen. Jason is a middle-aged man, with much glory, indeed, and some illusions; but a man entirely set upon building up a great career, to whom love and all its works, though at times he has found them convenient, are for the most part only irrational and disturbing elements in a world which he can otherwise mould to his will. And yet, most cruel touch of all, one feels this man to be the real Jason. It is not that he has fallen from his heroic past. It is that he was really like this always. And so with Medea. It is not only that her beauty has begun to fade; not only that she is set in surroundings which vaguely belittle and weaken her, making her no more a bountiful princess, but only an ambiguous and much criticised foreigner. Her very devotion of love for Jason, now turned to hatred, shows itself to have been always of that somewhat rank and ugly sort to which such a change is natural.

For concentrated dramatic quality and sheer intensity of passion few plays ever written can vie with the *Medea*. Yet it obtained only a third prize at its first production ; and, in spite of its immense fame, there are not many scholars who would put it among their favourite tragedies. The comparative failure of the first production was perhaps due chiefly to the extreme originality of the play. The Athenians in 432 B.C. had not yet learnt to understand or tolerate such work as this, though it is likely enough that they fortified their unfavourable opinion by the sort of criticisms which we still find attributed to Aristotle and Dicæarchus.

At the present time it is certainly not the newness of the subject : I do not think it is *Ægeus*, nor yet the dragon chariot, much less *Medea's* involuntary burst of tears in the second scene with *Jason*, that really produces the feeling of dissatisfaction with which many people must rise from this great play. It is rather the general scheme on which the drama is built. It is a scheme which occurs again and again in Euripides, a study of oppression and revenge. Such a subject in the hands of a more ordinary writer would probably take the form of a triumph of oppressed virtue. But Euripides gives us nothing so sympathetic, nothing so cheap and unreal. If oppression usually made people virtuous, the problems of the world would be very different from what they are. Euripides seems at times to hate the revenge of the oppressed almost as much as the original cruelty of the oppressor ; or, to put the same

fact in a different light, he seems deliberately to dwell upon the twofold evil of cruelty, that it not only causes pain to the victim, but actually by means of the pain makes him a worse man, so that when his turn of triumph comes, it is no longer a triumph of justice or a thing to make men rejoice. This is a grim lesson; taught often enough by history, though seldom by the fables of the poets.

Seventeen years later than the *Medea* Euripides expressed this sentiment in a more positive way in the *Trojan Women*, where a depth of wrong borne without revenge becomes, or seems for the moment to become, a thing beautiful and glorious. But more plays are constructed like the *Medea*. The *Hecuba* begins with a noble and injured Queen, and ends with her hideous vengeance on her enemy and his innocent sons. In the *Orestes* all our hearts go out to the suffering and deserted prince, till we find at last that we have committed ourselves to the blood-thirst of a madman. In the *Electra*, the workers of the vengeance themselves repent.

The dramatic effect of this kind of tragedy is curious. No one can call it undramatic or tame. Yet it is painfully unsatisfying. At the close of the *Medea* I actually find myself longing for a *deus ex machinâ*, for some being like Artemis in the *Hippolytus* or the good Dioscuri of the *Electra*, to speak a word of explanation or forgiveness, or at least leave some sound of music in our ears to drown that dreadful and insistent clamour of hate. The truth is that in this play Medea herself is the *dea ex machinâ*. The woman

whom Jason and Creon intended simply to crush has been transformed by her injuries from an individual human being into a sort of living Curse. She is inspired with superhuman force. Her wrongs and her hate fill all the sky. And the judgment pronounced on Jason comes not from any disinterested or peace-making God, but from his own victim transfigured into a devil.

From any such judgment there is an instant appeal to sane human sympathy. Jason has suffered more than enough. But that also is the way of the world. And the last word upon these tragic things is most often something not to be expressed by the sentences of even the wisest articulate judge, but only by the unspoken *lacrimæ rerum*.

G. M.

M E D E A

The Scene represents the front of MEDEA'S House in Corinth. A road to the right leads towards the royal castle, one on the left to the harbour. The NURSE is discovered alone.

NURSE.

1 Would God no Argo e'er had winged the seas
2 To Colchis through the blue Symplêgades :
3 No shaft of riven pine in Pêlion's glen
4 Shaped that first oar-blade in the hands of men
5 Valiant, who won, to save King Pelias' vow,
6 The fleece All-golden ! Never then, I trow,
7 Mine own princess, her spirit wounded sore
8 With love of Jason, to the encastled shore
9 Had sailed of old Iôlcô : never wrought
10 The daughters of King Pelias, knowing not,
11 To spill their father's life : nor fled in fear,
12 Hunted for that fierce sin, to Corinth here
13 With Jason and her babes. This folk at need
14 Stood friend to her, and she in word and deed
15 Served alway Jason. Surely this doth bind,
16 Through all ill days, the hurts of humankind,
17 When man and woman in one music move.
18 But now, the world is angry, and true love

- 19 Sick as with poison. Jason doth forsake
 20 My mistress and his own two sons, to make
 21 His couch in a king's chamber. He must wed :
 22 Wed with this Creon's child, who now is head
 23 And chief of Corinth. Wherefore sore betrayed
 24 Medea calleth up the oath they made,
 25 They two, and wakes the clasped hands again,
 26 The troth surpassing speech, and cries amain
 27 On God in heaven to mark the end, and how
 28 Jason hath paid his debt.

All fasting now

And cold, her body yielded up to pain,
 Her days a waste of weeping, she hath lain,
 Since first she knew that he was false. Her eyes
 Are lifted not ; and all her visage lies
 In the dust. If friends will speak, she hears no more
 Than some dead rock or wave that beats the shore :
 Only the white throat in a sudden shame
 May writhe, and all alone she moans the name
 Of father, and land, and home, forsook that day
 For this man's sake, who casteth her away.
 Not to be quite shut out from home . . . alas,
 She knoweth now how rare a thing that was !
 Methinks she hath a dread, not joy, to see
 Her children near. 'Tis this that maketh me
 Most tremble, lest she do I know not what.
 Her heart is no light thing, and useth not
 To brook much wrong. I know that woman, aye,
 And dread her ! Will she creep alone to die
 Bleeding in that old room, where still is laid
 Lord Jason's bed ? She hath for that a blade
 Made keen. Or slay the bridegroom and the king,
 And win herself God knows what direr thing ?

'Tis a fell spirit. Few, I ween, shall stir
Her hate unscathed, or lightly humble her.

Ha! 'Tis the children from their games again,
Rested and gay; and all their mother's pain
Forgotten! Young lives ever turn from gloom!

[*The CHILDREN and their ATTENDANT come in.*]

ATTENDANT.

Thou ancient treasure of my lady's room,
What mak'st thou here before the gates alone,
And alway turning on thy lips some moan
Of old mischances? Will our mistress be
Content, this long time to be left by thee?

NURSE.

Grey guard of Jason's children, a good thrall
Hath his own grief, if any hurt befall
His masters. Aye, it holds one's heart! . . .
Meseems

I have strayed out so deep in evil dreams,
I longed to rest me here alone, and cry
Medea's wrongs to this still Earth and Sky.

ATTENDANT.

How? Are the tears yet running in her eyes?

NURSE.

'Twere good to be like thee! . . . Her sorrow lies
Scarce wakened yet, not half its perils wrought.

ATTENDANT.

Mad spirit ! . . . if a man may speak his thought
Of masters mad.—And nothing in her ears
Hath sounded yet of her last cause for tears !

*[He moves towards the house, but the NURSE
checks him.]*

NURSE.

What cause, old man ? . . . Nay, grudge me not one
word.

ATTENDANT.

'Tis nothing. Best forget what thou hast heard.

NURSE.

Nay, housemate, by thy beard ! Hold it not hid
From me. . . . I will keep silence if thou bid.

ATTENDANT.

I heard an old man talking, where he sate
At draughts in the sun, beside the fountain gate,
And never thought of me, there standing still
Beside him. And he said, 'Twas Creon's will,
Being lord of all this land, that she be sent,
And with her her two sons, to banishment.
Maybe 'tis all false. For myself, I know
No further, and I would it were not so.

NURSE.

Jason will never bear it—his own sons
Banished,—however hot his anger runs
Against their mother !

ATTENDANT.

Old love burneth low
When new love wakes, men say. He is not now
Husband nor father here, nor any kin.

NURSE.

But this is ruin ! New waves breaking in
To wreck us, ere we are righted from the old !

ATTENDANT.

Well, hold thy peace. Our mistress will be told
All in good time. Speak thou no word hereof.

NURSE.

My babes ! What think ye of your father's love ?
God curse him not, he is my master still :
But, oh, to them that loved him, 'tis an ill
Friend. . . .

ATTENDANT.

And what man on earth is different ? How ?
Hast thou lived all these years, and learned but now
That every man more loveth his own head
Than other men's ? He dreameth of the bed
Of this new bride, and thinks not of his sons.

NURSE.

Go : run into the house, my little ones :
All will end happily ! . . . Keep them apart :
Let not their mother meet them while her heart

Is darkened. Yester night I saw a flame
 Stand in her eye, as though she hated them,
 And would I know not what. For sure her wrath
 Will never turn nor slumber, till she hath . . .
 Go : and if some must suffer, may it be
 Not we who love her, but some enemy !

VOICE (*within*).

O shame and pain : O woe is me !
 Would I could die in my misery !

[*The CHILDREN and the ATTENDANT go in.*]

NURSE.

Ah, children, hark ! She moves again
 Her frozen heart, her sleeping wrath.
 In, quick ! And never cross her path,
 Nor rouse that dark eye in its pain ;

That fell sea-spirit, and the dire
 Spring of a will untaught, unbowed.
 Quick, now !—Methinks this weeping cloud
 Hath in its heart some thunder-fire,

Slow gathering, that must flash ere long.
 I know not how, for ill or well,
 It turns, this uncontrollable
 Tempestuous spirit, blind with wrong.

VOICE (*within*).

Have I not suffered ? Doth it call
 No tears ? . . . Ha, ye beside the wall
 Unfathered children, God hate you
 As I am hated, and him, too,
 That gat you, and this house and all !

NURSE.

For pity ! What have they to do,
Babes, with their father's sin ? Why call
Thy curse on these ? . . . Ah, children, all
These days my bosom bleeds for you.

Rude are the wills of princes : yea,
Prevailing alway, seldom crossed,
On fitful winds their moods are tossed :
'Tis best men tread the equal way.

Aye, not with glory but with peace
May the long summers find me crowned :
For gentleness—her very sound
Is magic, and her usages

All wholesome : but the fiercely great
Hath little music on his road,
And falleth, when the hand of God
Shall move, most deep and desolate.

*[During the last words the LEADER of the
Chorus has entered. Other women follow
her.]*

LEADER.

I heard a voice and a moan,
A voice of the eastern seas :
Hath she found not yet her ease ?
Speak, O agèd one.
For I stood afar at the gate,
And there came from within a cry,

And wailing desolate.

Ah, no more joy have I,
For the griefs this house doth see,
And the love it hath wrought in me.

NURSE.

There is no house ! 'Tis gone. The lord
Seeketh a prouder bed : and she
Wastes in her chamber, nor one word
Will hear of care or charity.

VOICE (*within*).

O Zeus, O Earth, O Light,
Will the fire not stab my brain ?
What profiteth living ? Oh,
Shall I not lift the slow
Yoke, and let Life go,
As a beast out in the night,
To lie, and be rid of pain ?

CHORUS.

Some Women.

A.

“O Zeus, O Earth, O Light :”
The cry of a bride forlorn
Heard ye, and wailing born
Of lost delight ?

B.

Why weariest thou this day,
 Wild heart, for the bed abhorred,
The cold bed in the clay?
Death cometh though no man pray,
 Ungarlanded, un-adorèd.
 Call him not thou.

C.

If another's arms be now
 Where thine have been,
 On his head be the sin :
Rend not thy brow !

D.

All that thou sufferest,
 God seeth : Oh, not so sore
Waste nor weep for the breast
 That was thine of yore.

VOICE (*within*).

Virgin of Righteousness,
Virgin of hallowed Troth,
Ye marked me when with an oath
I bound him ; mark no less
That oath's end. Give me to see
Him and his bride, who sought
My grief when I wronged her not,
Broken in misery,

And all her house. . . . O God,
 My mother's home, and the dim
 Shore that I left for him,
 And the voice of my brother's blood. . . .

NURSE.

Oh, wild words ! Did ye hear her cry
 To them that guard man's faith forsworn,
 Themis and Zeus ? . . . This wrath new-born
 Shall make mad workings ere it die.

CHORUS.

Other Women.

A.

Would she but come to seek
 Our faces, that love her well,
 And take to her heart the spell
 Of words that speak ?

B.

Alas for the heavy hate
 And anger that burneth ever !
 Would it but now abate,
 Ah God, I love her yet.
 And surely my love's endeavour
 Shall fail not here.

C.

Go : from that chamber drear
 Forth to the day
 Lead her, and say, Oh, say
 That we love her dear.

D.

Go, lest her hand be hard
On the innocent : Ah, let be !
For her grief moves hitherward,
Like an angry sea.

NURSE.

That will I : though what words of mine
Or love shall move her ? Let them lie
With the old lost labours ! . . . Yet her eye—
Know ye the eyes of the wild kine,

The lion flash that guards their brood ?
So looks she now if any thrall
Speak comfort, or draw near at all
My mistress in her evil mood.

[*The NURSE goes into the house.*]

CHORUS.

A Woman.

Alas, the bold blithe bards of old
That all for joy their music made,
For feasts and dancing manifold,
That Life might listen and be glad.

But all the darkness and the wrong,
Quick deaths and dim heart-aching things,
Would no man ease them with a song
Or music of a thousand strings ?

Then song had served us in our need.
 What profit, o'er the banquet's swell
 That lingering cry that none may heed?
 The feast hath filled them : all is well !

Others.

I heard a song, but it comes no more,
 Where the tears ran over :
 A keen cry but tired, tired :
 A woman's cry for her heart's desired,
 For a traitor's kiss and a lost lover.
 But a prayer, methinks, yet riseth sore
 To God, to Faith, God's ancient daughter—
 The Faith that over sundering seas
 Drew her to Hellas, and the breeze
 Of midnight shivered, and the door
 Closed of the salt unsounded water.
*[During the last words MEDEA has come
 out from the house.]*

MEDEA.

Women of Corinth, I am come to show
 My face, lest ye despise me. For I know
 Some heads stand high and fail not, even at night
 Alone—far less like this, in all men's sight :
 And we, who study not our wayfarings
 But feel and cry—Oh we are drifting things,
 And evil ! For what truth is in men's eyes,
 Which search no heart, but in a flash despise

A strange face, shuddering back from one that ne'er
Hath wronged them? . . . Sure, far-comers any-
where,

I know, must bow them and be gentle. Nay,
A Greek himself men praise not, who alway
Should seek his own will recking not. . . . But I—
This thing undreamed of, sudden from on high,
Hath sapped my soul : I dazzle where I stand,
The cup of all life shattered in my hand,
Longing to die—O friends ! He, even he,
Whom to know well was all the world to me,
The man I loved, hath proved most evil.—Oh,
Of all things upon earth that bleed and grow,
A herb most bruised is woman. We must pay
Our store of gold, hoarded for that one day,
To buy us some man's love ; and lo, they bring
A master of our flesh ! There comes the sting
Of the whole shame. And then the jeopardy,
For good or ill, what shall that master be ;
Reject she cannot : and if he but stays
His suit, 'tis shame on all that woman's days.
So thrown amid new laws, new places, why,
'Tis magic she must have, or prophecy—
Home never taught her that—how best to guide
Toward peace this thing that sleepeth at her side.
And she who, labouring long, shall find some way
Whereby her lord may bear with her, nor fray
His yoke too fiercely, blessed is the breath
That woman draws ! Else, let her pray for death.
Her lord, if he be wearied of the face
Withindoors, gets him forth ; some merrier place
Will ease his heart : but she waits on, her whole
Vision enchained on a single soul.

And then, forsooth, 'tis they that face the call
Of war, while we sit sheltered, hid from all
Peril!—False mocking! Sooner would I stand
Three times to face their battles, shield in hand,
Than bear one child.

But peace! There cannot be
Ever the same tale told of thee and me.
Thou hast this city, and thy father's home,
And joy of friends, and hope in days to come :
But I, being citiless, am cast aside
By him that wedded me, a savage bride
Won in far seas and left—no mother near,
No brother, not one kinsman anywhere
For harbour in this storm. Therefore of thee
I ask one thing. If chance yet ope to me
Some path, if even now my hand can win
Strength to requite this Jason for his sin,
Betray me not! Oh, in all things but this,
I know how full of fears a woman is,
And faint at need, and shrinking from the light
Of battle : but once spoil her of her right
In man's love, and there moves, I warn thee well,
No bloodier spirit between heaven and hell.

LEADER.

I will betray thee not. It is but just,
Thou smite him.—And that weeping in the dust
And stormy tears, how should I blame them? . . .

Stay :

'Tis Creon, lord of Corinth, makes his way
Hither, and bears, methinks, some word of weight.

Enter from the right CREON, the King, with armed Attendants.

CREON.

Thou woman sullen-eyed and hot with hate
Against thy lord, Medea, I here command
That thou and thy two children from this land
Go forth to banishment. Make no delay :
Seeing ourselves, the King, are come this day
To see our charge fulfilled ; nor shall again
Look homeward ere we have led thy children twain
And thee beyond our realm's last boundary.

MEDEA.

Lost ! Lost !
Mine haters at the helm with sail flung free
Pursuing ; and for us no beach nor shore
In the endless waters ! . . . Yet, though stricken sore,
I still will ask thee, for what crime, what thing
Unlawful, wilt thou cast me out, O King ?

CREON.

What crime ? I fear thee, woman—little need
To cloak my reasons—lest thou work some deed
Of darkness on my child. And in that fear
Reasons enough have part. Thou comest here
A wise-woman confessed, and full of lore
In unknown ways of evil. Thou art sore
In heart, being parted from thy lover's arms.
And more, thou hast made menace . . . so the
alarms

But now have reached mine ear . . . on bride and groom,

And him who gave the bride, to work thy doom
Of vengeance. Which, ere yet it be too late,
I sweep aside. I choose to earn thine hate
Of set will now, not palter with the mood
Of mercy, and hereafter weep in blood.

MEDEA.

'Tis not the first nor second time, O King,
That fame hath hurt me, and come nigh to bring
My ruin. . . . How can any man, whose eyes
Are wholesome, seek to rear his children wise
Beyond men's wont? Much helplessness in arts
Of common life, and in their townsmen's hearts
Envy deep-set . . . so much their learning brings!
Come unto fools with knowledge of new things,
They deem it vanity, not knowledge. Aye,
And men that erst for wisdom were held high,
Feel thee a thorn to fret them, privily
Held higher than they. So hath it been with me.
A wise-woman I am; and for that sin
To divers ill names men would pen me in;
A seed of strife; an eastern dreamer; one
Of brand not theirs; one hard to play upon . . .
Ah, I am not so wondrous wise!—And now,
To thee, I am terrible! What fearest thou?
What dire deed? Do I tread so proud a path—
Fear me not thou!—that I should brave the wrath
Of princes? Thou: what hast thou ever done
To wrong me? Granted thine own child to one
Whom thy soul chose.—Ah, *him* out of my heart
I hate; but thou, meseems, hast done thy part

Not ill. And for thine houses' happiness
I hold no grudge. Go : marry, and God bless
Your issues. Only suffer me to rest
Somewhere within this land. Though sore oppressed,
I will be still, knowing mine own defeat.

CREON.

Thy words be gentle : but I fear me yet
Lest even now there creep some wickedness
Deep hid within thee. And for that the less
I trust thee now than ere these words began.
A woman quick of wrath, aye, or a man,
Is easier watching than the cold and still.

Up, straight, and find thy road ! Mock not my will
With words. This doom is passed beyond recall ;
Nor all thy crafts shall help thee, being withal
My manifest foe, to linger at my side.

MEDEA (*suddenly throwing herself down and
clinging to CREON*).

Oh, by thy knees ! By that new-wedded bride . . .

CREON.

'Tis waste of words. Thou shalt not weaken me.

MEDEA.

Wilt hunt me ? Spurn me when I kneel to thee ?

CREON.

'Tis mine own house that kneels to me, not thou.

MEDEA.

Home, my lost home, how I desire thee now !

CREON.

And I mine, and my child, beyond all things.

MEDEA.

O Loves of man, what curse is on your wings !

CREON.

Blessing or curse, 'tis as their chances flow.

MEDEA.

Remember, Zeus, the cause of all this woe !

CREON.

Oh, rid me of my pains ! Up, get thee gone !

MEDEA.

What would I with thy pains ? I have mine own.

CREON.

Up : or, 'fore God, my soldiers here shall fling . . .

MEDEA.

Not that ! Not that ! . . . I do but pray, O King . . .

CREON.

Thou wilt not? I must face the harsher task?

MEDEA.

I accept mine exile. 'Tis not that I ask.

CREON.

Why then so wild? Why clinging to mine hand?

MEDEA (*rising*).

For one day only leave me in thy land
At peace, to find some counsel, ere the strain
Of exile fall, some comfort for these twain,
Mine innocents; since others take no thought,
It seems, to save the babes that they begot.

Ah! Thou wilt pity them! Thou also art
A father: thou hast somewhere still a heart
That feels. . . . I reckon not of myself: 'tis they
That break me, fallen upon so dire a day.

CREON.

Mine is no tyrant's mood. Aye, many a time
Ere this my tenderness hath marred the chime
Of wisest counsels. And I know that now
I do mere folly. But so be it! Thou
Shalt have this grace . . . But this I warn thee clear,
If once the morrow's sunlight find thee here
Within my borders, thee or child of thine,
Thou diest! . . . Of this judgment not a line

Shall waver nor abate. So linger on,
 If thou needs must, till the next risen sun ;
 No further. . . . In one day there scarce can be
 Those perils wrought whose dread yet haunteth me.

[*Exit CREON with his suite.*]

CHORUS.

O woman, woman of sorrow,
 Where wilt thou turn and flee ?
 What town shall be thine to-morrow,
 What land of all lands that be,
 What door of a strange man's home ?
 Yea, God hath hunted thee,
 Medea, forth to the foam
 Of a trackless sea.

MEDEA.

Defeat on every side ; what else ?—But Oh,
 Not here the end is : think it not ! I know
 For bride and groom one battle yet untried,
 And goodly pains for him that gave the bride.

Dost dream I would have grovelled to this man,
 Save that I won mine end, and shaped my plan
 For merry deeds ? My lips had never deigned
 Speak word with him : my flesh been never stained
 With touching. . . . Fool, Oh, triple fool ! It lay
 So plain for him to kill my whole essay
 By exile swift : and, lo, he sets me free
 This one long day : wherein mine haters three
 Shall lie here dead, the father and the bride
 And husband—mine, not hers ! Oh, I have tried

So many thoughts of murder to my turn,
I know not which best likes me. Shall I burn
Their house with fire? Or stealing past unseen
To Jason's bed—I have a blade made keen
For that—stab, breast to breast, that wedded pair?
Good, but for one thing. When I am taken there,
And killed, they will laugh loud who hate me. . . .
Nay,

I love the old way best, the simple way
Of poison, where we too are strong as men.
Ah me!

And they being dead—what place shall hold me then?
What friend shall rise, with land inviolate
And trusty doors, to shelter from their hate
This flesh? . . . None anywhere! . . . A little
more

I needs must wait: and, if there ope some door
Of refuge, some strong tower to shield me, good:
In craft and darkness I will hunt this blood.
Else, if mine hour be come and no hope nigh,
Then sword in hand, full-willed and sure to die,
I yet will live to slay them. I will wend
Man-like, their road of daring to the end.

So help me She who of all Gods hath been
The best to me, of all my chosen queen
And helpmate, Hecatê, who dwells apart,
The flame of flame, in my fire's inmost heart:
For all their strength, they shall not stab my soul
And laugh thereafter! Dark and full of dole
Their bridal feast shall be, most dark the day
They joined their hands, and hunted me away.

Awake thee now, Medea! Whatso plot
Thou hast, or cunning, strive and falter not.

On to the peril-point ! Now comes the strain
 Of daring. Shall they trample thee again ?
 How ? And with Hellas laughing o'er thy fall
 While this thief's daughter weds, and weds withal
 Jason ? . . . A true king was thy father, yea,
 And born of the ancient Sun ! . . . Thou know'st
 the way ;
 And God hath made thee woman, things most vain
 For help, but wondrous in the paths of pain.
 [MEDEA goes into the House.]

CHORUS.

Back streams the wave on the ever-running river :
 Life, life is changed and the laws of it o'ertrod.
 Man shall be the slave, the affrighted, the low-liver !
 Man hath forgotten God.
 And woman, yea, woman, shall be terrible in story :
 The tales too, meseemeth, shall be other than of
 yore.
 For a fear there is that cometh out of Woman and a
 glory,
 And the hard hating voices shall encompass her no
 more !

 The old bards shall cease, and their memory that
 lingers
 Of frail brides and faithless, shall be shrivelled as
 with fire.
 For they loved us not, nor knew us : and our lips were
 dumb, our fingers
 Could wake not the secret of the lyre.

Else, else, O God the Singer, I had sung amid their
rages

A long tale of Man and his deeds for good and
ill.

But the old World knoweth—'tis the speech of all
his ages—

Man's wrong and ours : he knoweth and is still.

Some Women.

Forth from thy father's home
Thou camest, O heart of fire,
To the Dark Blue Rocks, to the clashing foam,
To the seas of thy desire :

Till the Dark Blue Bar was crossed ;
And, lo, by an alien river
Standing, thy lover lost,
Void-armed for ever,

Forth yet again, O lowest
Of landless women, a ranger
Of desolate ways, thou goest,
From the walls of the stranger.

Others.

And the great Oath waxeth weak ;
And Ruth, as a thing outstriven,
Is fled, fled, from the shores of the Greek,
Away on the winds of heaven.

Dark is the house afar,
Where an old king called thee daughter ;
All that was once thy star
In stormy water,

Dark : and, lo, in the nearer
House that was sworn to love thee,
Another, queenlier, dearer,
Is thronèd above thee.

Enter from the right JASON.

JASON.

Oft have I seen, in other days than these,
How a dark temper maketh maladies
No friend can heal. 'Twas easy to have kept
Both land and home. It needed but to accept
Unstrivingly the pleasure of our lords.
But thou, for mere delight in stormy words,
Wilt lose all ! . . . Now thy speech provokes not me.
Rail on. Of all mankind let Jason be
Most evil ; none shall check thee. But for these
Dark threats cast out against the majesties
Of Corinth, count as veriest gain thy path
Of exile. I myself, when princely wrath
Was hot against thee, strove with all good will
To appease the wrath, and wished to keep thee still
Beside me. But thy mouth would never stay
From vanity, blaspheming night and day
Our masters. Therefore thou shalt fly the land.
Yet, even so, I will not hold my hand
From succouring mine own people. Here am I
To help thee, woman, pondering heedfully

Thy new state. For I would not have thee flung
Provisionless away—aye, and the young
Children as well ; nor lacking aught that will
Of mine can bring thee. Many a lesser ill
Hangs on the heels of exile. . . . Aye, and though
Thou hate me, dream not that my heart can know
Or fashion aught of angry will to thee.

MEDEA.

Evil, most evil ! . . . since thou grantest me
That comfort, the worst weapon left me now
To smite a coward. . . . Thou comest to me, thou,
Mine enemy ! (*Turning to the CHORUS.*) Oh, say,
how call ye this,
To face, and smile, the comrade whom his kiss
Betrayed ? Scorn ? Insult ? Courage ? None of
these :

'Tis but of all man's inward sicknesses
The vilest, that he knoweth not of shame
Nor pity ! Yet I praise him that he came . . .
To me it shall bring comfort, once to clear
My heart on thee, and thou shalt wince to hear.

I will begin with that, 'twixt me and thee,
That first befell. I saved thee. I saved thee—
Let thine own Greeks be witness, every one
That sailed on Argo—saved thee, sent alone
To yoke with yokes the bulls of fiery breath,
And sow that Acre of the Lords of Death ;
And mine own ancient Serpent, who did keep
The Golden Fleece, the eyes that knew not sleep,
And shining coils, him also did I smite
Dead for thy sake, and lifted up the light

That bade thee live. Myself, uncounsellèd,
 Stole forth from father and from home, and fled
 Where dark Iôlcos under Pelion lies,
 With thee—Oh, single-hearted more than wise !
 I murdered Pelias, yea, in agony,
 By his own daughters' hands, for sake of thee ;
 I swept their house like War.—And hast thou then
 Accepted all—O evil yet again !—
 And cast me off and taken thee for bride
 Another ? And with children at thy side !
 One could forgive a childless man. But no :
 I have borne thee children . . .

Is sworn faith so low

And weak a thing ? I understand it not.
 Are the old gods dead ? Are the old laws forgot,
 And new laws made ? Since not my passioning,
 But thine own heart, doth cry thee for a thing
 Forsworn.

*[She catches sight of her own hand which she
 has thrown out to denounce him.]*

Poor, poor right hand of mine, whom he
 Did cling to, and these knees, so cravingly,
 We are unclean, thou and I ; we have caught the stain
 Of bad men's flesh . . . and dreamed our dreams in
 vain.

Thou comest to befriend me ? Give me, then,
 Thy counsel. 'Tis not that I dream again
 For good from thee : but, questioned, thou wilt show
 The viler. Say : now whither shall I go ?
 Back to my father ? Him I did betray,
 And all his land, when we two fled away.
 To those poor Peliad maids ? For them 'twere good
 To take me in, who spilled their father's blood. . . .

Aye, so my whole life stands ! There were at home
Who loved me well : to them I am become
A curse. And the first friends who sheltered me,
Whom most I should have spared, to pleasure thee
I have turned to foes. Oh, therefore hast thou laid
My crown upon me, blest of many a maid
In Hellas, now I have won what all did crave,
Thee, the world-wondered lover and the brave ;
Who this day looks and sees me banished, thrown
Away with these two babes, all, all, alone . . .
Oh, merry mocking when the lamps are red :
“Where go the bridegroom’s babes to beg their bread
In exile, and the woman who gave all
To save him ?”

O great God, shall gold withal
Bear thy clear mark, to sift the base and fine,
And o’er man’s living visage runs no sign
To show the lie within, ere all too late ?

LEADER.

Dire and beyond all healing is the hate
When hearts that loved are turned to enmity.

JASON.

In speech at least, meseemeth, I must be
Not evil ; but, as some old pilot goes
Furled to his sail’s last edge, when danger blows
Too fiery, run before the wind and swell,
Woman, of thy loud storms.—And thus I tell
My tale. Since thou wilt build so wondrous high
Thy deeds of service in my jeopardy,

To all my crew and quest I know but one
 Saviour, of Gods or mortals one alone,
 The Cyprian. Oh, thou hast both brain and wit,
 Yet underneath . . . nay, all the tale of it
 Were graceless telling ; how sheer love, a fire
 Of poison-shafts, compelled thee with desire
 To save me. But enough. I will not score
 That count too close. 'Twas good help : and there-
 for

I give thee thanks, howe'er the help was wrought.
 Howbeit, in my deliverance, thou hast got
 Far more than given. A good Greek land hath
 been

Thy lasting home, not barbary. Thou hast seen
 Our ordered life, and justice, and the long
 Still grasp of law not changing with the strong
 Man's pleasure. Then, all Hellas far and near
 Hath learned thy wisdom, and in every ear
 Thy fame is. Had thy days run by unseen
 On that last edge of the world, where then had been
 The story of great Medea ? Thou and I . . .
 What worth to us were treasures heaped high
 In rich kings' rooms ; what worth a voice of gold
 More sweet than ever rang from Orpheus old,
 Unless our deeds have glory ?

Speak I so,

Touching the Quest I wrought, thyself did throw
 The challenge down. Next for thy cavilling
 Of wrath at mine alliance with a king,
 Here thou shalt see I both was wise, and free
 From touch of passion, and a friend to thee
 Most potent, and my children . . . Nay, be still !
 When first I stood in Corinth, clogged with ill

From many a desperate mischance, what bliss
Could I that day have dreamed of, like to this,
To wed with a king's daughter, I exiled
And beggared? Not—what makes thy passion
wild—

From loathing of thy bed ; not over-fraught
With love for this new bride ; not that I sought
To upbuild mine house with offspring : 'tis enough,
What thou hast borne : I make no word thereof :
But, first and greatest, that we all might dwell
In a fair house and want not, knowing well
That poor men have no friends, but far and near
Shunning and silence. Next, I sought to rear
Our sons in nurture worthy of my race,
And, raising brethren to them, in one place
Join both my houses, and be all from now
Prince-like and happy. What more need hast
thou

Of children? And for me, it serves my star
To link in strength the children that now are
With those that shall be.

Have I counselled ill?
Not thine own self would say it, couldst thou still
One hour thy jealous flesh.—'Tis ever so!
Who looks for more in women? When the flow
Of love runs plain, why, all the world is fair :
But, once there fall some ill chance anywhere
To baulk that thirst, down in swift hate are trod
Men's dearest aims and noblest. Would to God
We mortals by some other seed could raise
Our fruits, and no blind women block our ways!
Then had there been no curse to wreck man-
kind.

LEADER.

Lord Jason, very subtly hast thou twined
Thy speech : but yet, though all athwart thy will
I speak, this is not well thou dost, but ill,
Betraying her who loved thee and was true.

MEDEA.

Surely I have my thoughts, and not a few
Have held me strange. To me it seemeth, when
A crafty tongue is given to evil men
'Tis like to wreck, not help them. Their own brain
Tempts them with lies to dare and dare again,
Till . . . no man hath enough of subtlety.
As thou—be not so seeming-fair to me
Nor deft of speech. One word will make thee fall.
Wert thou not false, 'twas thine to tell me all,
And charge me help thy marriage path, as I
Did love thee ; not befool me with a lie.

JASON.

An easy task had that been ! Aye, and thou
A loving aid, who canst not, even now,
Still that loud heart that surges like the tide !

MEDEA.

That moved thee not. Thine old barbarian bride,
The dog out of the east who loved thee sore,
She grew grey-haired, she served thy pride no more.

JASON.

Now understand for once ! The girl to me
Is nothing, in this web of sovranty
I hold. I do but seek to save, even yet,
Thee : and for brethren to our sons beget
Young kings, to prosper all our lives again.

MEDEA.

God shelter me from prosperous days of pain,
And wealth that maketh wounds about my heart.

JASON.

Wilt change that prayer, and choose a wiser part ?
Pray not to hold true sense for pain, nor rate
Thyself unhappy, being too fortunate.

MEDEA.

Aye, mock me ; thou hast where to lay thine head,
But I go naked to mine exile.

JASON.

Tread
Thine own path ! Thou hast made it all to be.

MEDEA.

How ? By seducing and forsaking thee ?

JASON.

By those vile curses on the royal halls
Let loose. . . .

MEDEA.

On thy house also, as chance falls,
I am a living curse.

JASON.

Oh, peace ! Enough
Of these vain wars : I will no more thereof.
If thou wilt take from all that I possess
Aid for these babes and thine own helplessness
Of exile, speak thy bidding. Here I stand
Full-willed to succour thee with stintless hand,
And send my signet to old friends that dwell
On foreign shores, who will entreat thee well.
Refuse, and thou shalt do a deed most vain.
But cast thy rage away, and thou shalt gain
Much, and lose little for thine anger's sake.

MEDEA.

I will not seek thy friends. I will not take
Thy givings. Give them not. Fruits of a stem
Unholy bring no blessing after them.

JASON.

Now God in heaven be witness, all my heart
Is willing, in all ways, to do its part

For thee and for thy babes. But nothing good
Can please thee. In sheer savageness of mood
Thou drivest from thee every friend. Wherefore
I warrant thee, thy pains shall be the more.

[He goes slowly away.]

MEDEA.

Go : thou art weary for the new delight
Thou wooest, so long tarrying out of sight
Of her sweet chamber. Go, fulfil thy pride,
O bridegroom ! For it may be, such a bride
Shall wait thee,—yea, God heareth me in this—
As thine own heart shall sicken ere it kiss.

CHORUS.

Alas, the Love that falleth like a flood,
Strong-winged and transitory :
Why praise ye him ? What beareth he of good
To man, or glory ?
Yet Love there is that moves in gentleness,
Heart-filling, sweetest of all powers that bless.
Loose not on me, O Holder of man's heart,
Thy golden quiver,
Nor steep in poison of desire the dart
That heals not ever.

The pent hate of the word that cavilleth,
The strife that hath no fill,
Where once was fondness ; and the mad heart's breath
For strange love panting still :
O Cyprian, cast me not on these ; but sift,
Keen-eyed, of love the good and evil gift.

Make Innocence my friend, God's fairest star,
 Yea, and abate not
 The rare sweet beat of bosoms without war,
 That love, and hate not.

Others.

Home of my heart, land of my own,
 Cast me not, nay, for pity,
 Out on my ways, helpless, alone,
 Where the feet fail in the mire and stone,
 A woman without a city.
 Ah, not that! Better the end :
 The green grave cover me rather,
 If a break must come in the days I know,
 And the skies be changed and the earth below ;
 For the weariest road that man may wend
 Is forth from the home of his father.

Lo, we have seen : 'tis not a song
 Sung, nor learned of another.
 For whom hast thou in thy direst wrong
 For comfort ? Never a city strong
 To hide thee, never a brother.
 Ah, but the man—cursèd be he,
 Cursèd beyond recover,
 Who openeth, shattering, seal by seal,
 A friend's clean heart, then turns his heel,
 Deaf unto love : never in me
 Friend shall he know nor lover.

[While MEDEA is waiting downcast, seated upon her door-step, there passes from the left a traveller with followers. As he catches sight of MEDEA he stops

ÆGEUS.

Have joy, Medea ! 'Tis the homeliest
Word that old friends can greet with, and the best.

MEDEA (*looking up, surprised*).

Oh, joy on thee, too, Ægeus, gentle king
Of Athens !—But whence com'st thou journeying ?

ÆGEUS.

From Delphi now and the old encavern'd stair. . . .

MEDEA.

Where Earth's heart speaks in song ? What mad'st
thou there ?

ÆGEUS.

Prayed heaven for children—the same search always.

MEDEA.

Children ? Ah God ! Art childless to this day ?

ÆGEUS.

So God hath willed. Childless and desolate.

MEDEA.

What word did Phœbus speak, to change thy fate ?

ÆGEUS.

Riddles, too hard for mortal man to read.

MEDEA.

Which I may hear ?

ÆGEUS.

Assuredly : they need

A rarer wit.

MEDEA.

How said he ?

ÆGEUS.

Not to spill

Life's wine, nor seek for more. . . .

MEDEA.

Until ?

ÆGEUS.

Until

I tread the hearth-stone of my sires of yore.

MEDEA.

And what should bring thee here, by Creon's shore ?

ÆGEUS.

One Pittheus know'st thou, high lord of Trozên ?

MEDEA.

Aye, Pelops' son, a man most pure of sin.

ÆGEUS.

Him I would ask, touching Apollo's will.

MEDEA.

Much use in God's ways hath he, and much skill.

ÆGEUS.

And, long years back he was my battle-friend,
The truest e'er man had.

MEDEA.

Well, may God send
Good hap to thee, and grant all thy desire.

ÆGEUS.

But thou . . . ? Thy frame is wasted, and the fire
Dead in thine eyes.

MEDEA.

Ægeus, my husband is
The falsest man in the world.

ÆGEUS.

What word is this?
Say clearly what thus makes thy visage dim?

MEDEA.

He is false to me, who never injured him.

AEGEUS.

What hath he done ? Show all, that I may see.

MEDEA.

Ta'en him a wife ; a wife, set over me
To rule his house !

AEGEUS.

He hath not dared to do,
Jason, a thing so shameful ?

MEDEA.

Aye, 'tis true :
And those he loved of yore have no place now.

AEGEUS.

Some passion sweepeth him ? Or is it thou
He turns from ?

MEDEA.

Passion, passion to betray
His dearest !

AEGEUS.

Shame be his, so fallen away
From honour !

MEDEA.

Passion to be near a throne,
A king's heir !

AEGEUS.

How, who gives the bride ? Say on.

MEDEA.

Creon, who o'er all Corinth standeth chief.

AEGEUS.

Woman, thou hast indeed much cause for grief.

MEDEA.

'Tis ruin.—And they have cast me out as well.

AEGEUS.

Who ? 'Tis a new wrong this, and terrible.

MEDEA.

Creon the king, from every land and shore. . . .

AEGEUS.

And Jason suffers him ? Oh, 'tis too sore !

MEDEA.

He loveth to bear bravely ills like these !

But, Aegeus, by thy beard, oh, by thy knees,
I pray thee, and I give me for thine own,
Thy suppliant, pity me ! Oh, pity one
So miserable. Thou never wilt stand there
And see me cast out friendless to despair.
Give me a home in Athens . . . by the fire
Of thine own hearth ! Oh, so may thy desire
Of children be fulfilled of God, and thou
Die happy ! . . . Thou canst know not ; even now
Thy prize is won ! I, I will make of thee
A childless man no more. The seed shall be,
I swear it, sown. Such magic herbs I know.

AEGEUS.

Woman, indeed my heart goes forth to show
This help to thee, first for religion's sake,
Then for thy promised hope, to heal my ache
Of childlessness. 'Tis this hath made mine whole
Life as a shadow, and starved out my soul.
But thus it stands with me. Once make thy way
To Attic earth, I, as in law I may,
Will keep thee and befriend. But in this land,
Where Creon rules, I may not raise my hand
To shelter thee. Move of thine own essay
To seek my house, there thou shalt alway stay,
Inviolatè, never to be seized again.
But come thyself from Corinth. I would fain
Even in foreign eyes be alway just.

MEDEA.

'Tis well. Give me an oath wherein to trust
And all that man could ask thou hast granted me.

AEGEUS.

Dost trust me not? Or what thing troubleth thee?

MEDEA.

I trust thee. But so many, far and near,
Do hate me—all King Pelias' house, and here
Creon. Once bound by oaths and sanctities
Thou canst not yield me up for such as these
To drag from Athens. But a spoken word,
No more, to bind thee, which no God hath heard. . . .
The embassies, methinks, would come and go :
They all are friends to thee. . . . Ah me, I know
Thou wilt not list to me ! So weak am I,
And they full-filled with gold and majesty.

AEGEUS.

Methinks 'tis a far foresight, this thine oath.
Still, if thou so wilt have it, nothing loath
Am I to serve thee. Mine own hand is so
The stronger, if I have this plea to show
Thy persecutors : and for thee withal
The bond more sure.—On what God shall I call ?

MEDEA.

Swear by the Earth thou treadest, by the Sun,
Sire of my sires, and all the gods as one. . . .

ÆGEUS.

To do what thing or not do? Make all plain.

MEDEA.

Never thyself to cast me out again.
Nor let another, whatsoe'er his plea,
Take me, while thou yet livest and art free.

ÆGEUS.

Never : so hear me, Earth, and the great star
Of daylight, and all other gods that are !

MEDEA.

'Tis well : and if thou falter from thy vow . . . ?

ÆGEUS.

God's judgment on the godless break my brow !

MEDEA.

Go ! Go thy ways rejoicing.—All is bright
And clear before me. Go : and ere the night
Myself will follow, when the deed is done
I purpose, and the end I thirst for won.

[ÆGEUS and his train depart.]

CHORUS.

Farewell : and Maia's guiding Son
Back lead thee to thy hearth and fire,
Aegeus ; and all the long desire
That wasteth thee, at last be won :
Our eyes have seen thee as thou art,
A gentle and a righteous heart.

MEDEA.

God, and God's Justice, and ye blinding Skies !
At last the victory dawneth ! Yea, mine eyes
See, and my foot is on the mountain's brow.
Mine enemies ! Mine enemies, oh, now
Atonement cometh ! Here at my worst hour
A friend is found, a very port of power
To save my shipwreck. Here will I make fast
Mine anchor, and escape them at the last
In Athens' wallèd hill.—But ere the end
'Tis meet I show thee all my counsel, friend :
Take it, no tale to make men laugh withal !

Straightway to Jason I will send some thrall
To entreat him to my presence. Comes he here,
Then with soft reasons will I feed his ear,
How his will now is my will, how all things
Are well, touching this marriage-bed of kings
For which I am betrayed—all wise and rare
And profitable ! Yet will I make one prayer,
That my two children be no more exiled
But stay. . . . Oh, not that I would leave a child

Here upon angry shores till those have laughed
Who hate me : 'tis that I will slay by craft
The king's daughter. With gifts they shall be sent,
Gifts to the bride to spare their banishment,
Fine robings and a carcanet of gold.
Which raiment let her once but take, and fold
About her, a foul death that girl shall die
And all who touch her in her agony.

Such poison shall they drink, my robe and wreath !

Howbeit, of that no more. I gnash my teeth
Thinking on what a path my feet must tread
Thereafter. I shall lay those children dead—
Mine, whom no hand shall steal from me away !
Then, leaving Jason childless, and the day
As night above him, I will go my road
To exile, flying, flying from the blood
Of these my best-beloved, and having wrought
All horror, so but one thing reach me not,
The laugh of them that hate us.

Let it come !

What profits life to me ? I have no home,
No country now, nor shield from any wrong.
That was my evil hour, when down the long
Halls of my father out I stole, my will
Chained by a Greek man's voice, who still, oh, still,
If God yet live, shall all requited be.
For never child of mine shall Jason see
Hereafter living, never child beget
From his new bride, who this day, desolate
Even as she made me desolate, shall die
Shrieking amid my poisons. . . . Names have I
Among your folk ? One light ? One weak of hand ?
An eastern dreamer ?—Nay, but with the brand

Of strange suns burnt, my hate, by God above,
A perilous thing, and passing sweet my love !
For these it is that make life glorious.

LEADER.

Since thou hast bared thy fell intent to us
I, loving thee, and helping in their need
Man's laws, adjure thee, dream not of this deed !

MEDEA.

There is no other way.—I pardon thee
Thy littleness, who art not wronged like me.

LEADER.

Thou canst not kill the fruit thy body bore !

MEDEA.

Yes : if the man I hate be pained the more.

LEADER.

And thou made miserable, most miserable ?

MEDEA.

Oh, let it come ! All words of good or ill
Are wasted now.

*[She claps her hands : the NURSE comes out
from the house.]*

Ho, woman ; get thee gone
And lead lord Jason hither. . . . There is none

Like thee, to work me these high services.
 But speak no word of what my purpose is,
 As thou art faithful, thou, and bold to try
 All succours, and a woman even as I !

[*The NURSE departs.*]

CHORUS.

The sons of Erechtheus, the olden,
 Whom high gods planted of yore
 In an old land of heaven upholden,
 A proud land untrodden of war :
 They are hungered, and, lo, their desire
 With wisdom is fed as with meat :
 In their skies is a shining of fire,
 A joy in the fall of their feet :
 And thither, with manifold dowers,
 From the North, from the hills, from the morn,
 The Muses did gather their powers,
 That a child of the Nine should be born ;
 And Harmony, sown as the flowers,
 Grew gold in the acres of corn.

And Cephîsus, the fair-flowing river—
 The Cyprian dipping her hand
 Hath drawn of his dew, and the shiver
 Of her touch is as joy in the land.
 For her breathing in fragrance is written,
 And in music her path as she goes,
 And the cloud of her hair, it is litten
 With stars of the wind-woven rose.
 So fareth she ever and ever,
 And forth of her bosom is blown,

As dews on the winds of the river,
An hunger of passions unknown,
Strong Loves of all godlike endeavour,
Whom Wisdom shall throne on her throne.

Some Women.

But Cephîsus the fair-flowing,
Will he bear thee on his shore ?
Shall the land that succours all, succour thee,
Who art foul among thy kind,
With the tears of children blind ?
Dost thou see the red gash growing,
Thine own burden dost thou see ?
Every side, Every way,
Lo, we kneel to thee and pray :
By thy knees, by thy soul, O woman wild !
One at least thou canst not slay,
Not thy child !

Others.

Hast thou ice that thou shalt bind it
To thy breast, and make thee dead
To thy children, to thine own spirit's pain ?
When the hand knows what it dares,
When thine eyes look into theirs,
Shalt thou keep by tears unblinded
Thy dividing of the slain ?
These be deeds Not for thee :
These be things that cannot be !
Thy babes—though thine hardihood be fell,
When they cling about thy knee,
'Twill be well !

Enter JASON.

JASON.

I answer to thy call. Though full of hate
Thou be, I yet will not so far abate
My kindness for thee, nor refuse mine ear.
Say in what new desire thou hast called me here.

MEDEA.

Jason, I pray thee, for my words but now
Spoken, forgive me. My bad moods. . . . Oh, thou
At least wilt strive to bear with them ! There be
Many old deeds of love 'twixt me and thee.
Lo, I have reasoned with myself apart
And chidden : "Why must I be mad, O heart
Of mine : and raging against one whose word
Is wisdom : making me a thing abhorred
To them that rule the land, and to mine own
Husband, who doth but that which, being done,
Will help us all—to wed a queen, and get
Young kings for brethren to my sons ? And yet
I rage alone, and cannot quit my rage—
What aileth me ?—when God sends harbourage
So simple ? Have I not my children ? Know
I not we are but exiles, and must go
Beggared and friendless else ?" Thought upon
thought
So pressed me, till I knew myself full-fraught
With bitterness of heart and blinded eyes.
So now—I give thee thanks : and hold thee wise

To have caught this anchor for our aid. The fool
Was I ; who should have been thy friend, thy tool ;
Gone wooing with thee, stood at thy bed-side
Serving, and welcomed duteously thy bride.

But, as we are, we are—I will not say
Mere evil—women ! Why must thou to-day
Turn strange, and make thee like some evil thing,
Childish, to meet my childish passioning ?
See, I surrender : and confess that then
I had bad thoughts, but now have turned again
And found my wiser mind. [She claps her hands.

Ho, children ! Run
Quickly ! Come hither, out into the sun,
[The CHILDREN come from the house, followed
by their ATTENDANT.

And greet your father. Welcome him with us,
And throw quite, quite away, as mother does,
Your anger against one so dear. Our peace
Is made, and all the old bad war shall cease
For ever.—Go, and take his hand. . . .

[As the CHILDREN go to JASON, she suddenly
bursts into tears. The CHILDREN quickly
return to her : she recovers herself, smiling
amid her tears.

Ah me,
I am full of hidden horrors ! . . . Shall it be
A long time more, my children, that ye live
To reach to me those dear, dear arms ? . . . Forgive !
I am so ready with my tears to-day,
And full of dread. . . . I sought to smooth away
The long strife with your father, and, lo, now
I have all drowned with tears this little brow !

[She wipes the child's face.

LEADER.

O'er mine eyes too there stealeth a pale tear :
Let the evil rest, O God, let it rest here !

JASON.

Woman, indeed I praise thee now, nor say
Ill of thine other hour. 'Tis nature's way,
A woman needs must stir herself to wrath,
When work of marriage by so strange a path
Crosseth her lord. But thou, thine heart doth
wend

The happier road. Thou hast seen, ere quite the
end,

What choice must needs be stronger : which to do
Shows a wise-minded woman. . . . And for you,
Children ; your father never has forgot
Your needs. If God but help him, he hath wrought
A strong deliverance for your weakness. Yea,
I think you, with your brethren, yet one day
Shall be the mightiest voices in this land.

Do you grow tall and strong. Your father's hand
Guideth all else, and whatso power divine
Hath alway helped him. . . . Ah, may it be mine
To see you yet in manhood, stern of brow,
Strong-armed, set high o'er those that hate me. . . .

How ?

Woman, thy face is turned. Thy cheek is swept
With pallor of strange tears. Dost not accept
Gladly and of good will my benisons ?

MEDEA.

'Tis nothing. Thinking of these little ones. . . .

JASON.

Take heart, then. I will guard them from all ill.

MEDEA.

I do take heart. Thy word I never will
Mistrust. Alas, a woman's bosom bears
But woman's courage, a thing born for tears.

JASON.

What ails thee?—All too sore thou weepst there.

MEDEA.

I was their mother! When I heard thy prayer
Of long life for them, there swept over me
A horror, wondering how these things shall be.

But for the matter of my need that thou
Should speak with me, part I have said, and now
Will finish.—Seeing it is the king's behest
To cast me out from Corinth . . . aye, and best,
Far best, for me—I know it—not to stay
Longer to trouble thee and those who sway
The realm, being held to all their house a foe. . . .
Behold, I spread my sails, and meekly go

To exile. But our children. . . . Could this land
Be still their home awhile : could thine own hand
But guide their boyhood. . . . Seek the king, and
 pray
His pity, that he bid thy children stay !

JASON.

He is hard to move. Yet surely 'twere well done.

MEDEA.

Bid her—for thy sake, for a daughter's boon. . . .

JASON.

Well thought ! Her I can fashion to my mind.

MEDEA.

Surely. She is a woman like her kind. . . .
Yet I will aid thee in thy labour ; I
Will send her gifts, the fairest gifts that lie
In the hands of men, things of the days of old,
Fine robings and a carcanet of gold,
By the boys' hands.—Go, quick, some handmaiden,
And fetch the raiment.

[A handmaid goes into the house.]

Ah, her cup shall then
Be filled indeed ! What more should woman crave,
Being wed with thee, the bravest of the brave,

And girt with raiment which of old the sire
Of all my house, the Sun, gave, steeped in fire,
To his own fiery race?

[The handmaid has returned bearing the Gifts.]

Come, children, lift
With heed these caskets. Bear them as your gift
To her, being bride and princess and of right
Blessed!—I think she will not hold them light.

JASON.

Fond woman, why wilt empty thus thine hand
Of treasure? Doth King Creon's castle stand
In stint of raiment, or in stint of gold?
Keep these, and make no gift. For if she hold
Jason of any worth at all, I swear
Chattels like these will not weigh more with her.

MEDEA.

Ah, chide me not! 'Tis written, gifts persuade
The gods in heaven; and gold is stronger made
Than words innumerable to bend men's ways.
Fortune is hers. God maketh great her days:
Young and a crown'd queen! And banishment
For those two babes. . . . I would not gold were
spent,
But life's blood, ere that come.

My children, go
Forth into those rich halls, and, bowing low,
Beseech your father's bride, whom I obey,
Ye be not, of her mercy, cast away

Exiled : and give the caskets—above all
 Mark this !—to none but her, to hold withal
 And keep. . . . Go quick ! And let your mother
 know

Soon the good tiding that she longs for. . . . Go !
*[She goes quickly into the house. JASON and
 the CHILDREN with their ATTENDANT
 depart.]*

CHORUS.

Now I have no hope more of the children's living ;
 No hope more. They are gone forth unto death.
 The bride, she taketh the poison of their giving :
 She taketh the bounden gold and openeth ;
 And the crown, the crown, she lifteth about her brow,
 Where the light brown curls are clustering. No
 hope now !

O sweet and cloudy gleam of the garments golden !
 The robe, it hath clasped her breast and the crown
 her head.
 Then, then, she decketh the bride, as a bride of
 olden
 Story, that goeth pale to the kiss of the dead.
 For the ring hath closed, and the portion of death
 is there ;
 And she flieth not, but perisheth unaware.

Some Women.

O bridegroom, bridegroom of the kiss so cold,
 Art thou wed with princes, art thou girt with gold,

Who know'st not, suing
For thy child's undoing,
And, on her thou lovest, for a doom untold?
How art thou fallen from thy place of old!

Others.

O Mother, Mother, what hast thou to reap,
When the harvest cometh, between wake and sleep?
For a heart unslaken,
For a troth forsaken,
Lo, babes that call thee from a bloody deep:
And thy love returns not. Get thee forth and weep!
[Enter the ATTENDANT with the two
CHILDREN: MEDEA comes out from
the house.]

ATTENDANT.

Mistress, these children from their banishment
Are spared. The royal bride hath mildly bent
Her hand to accept thy gifts, and all is now
Peace for the children.—Ha, why standest thou
Confounded, when good fortune draweth near?

MEDEA.

Ah God!

ATTENDANT.

This chimes not with the news I bear.

MEDEA.

O God, have mercy!

ATTENDANT.

Is some word of wrath
Here hidden that I knew not of? And hath
My hope to give thee joy so cheated me?

MEDEA.

Thou givest what thou givest : I blame not thee.

ATTENDANT.

Thy brows are all o'ercast : thine eyes are filled. . . .

MEDEA.

For bitter need, Old Man ! The gods have willed,
And mine own evil mind, that this should come.

ATTENDANT.

Take heart ! Thy sons one day will bring thee home.

MEDEA.

Home ? . . . I have others to send home. Woe's me !

ATTENDANT.

Be patient. Many a mother before thee
Hath parted from her children. We poor things
Of men must needs endure what fortune brings.

MEDEA.

I will endure.—Go thou within, and lay
All ready that my sons may need to-day.

[*The ATTENDANT goes into the house.*]

O children, children mine : and you have found
A land and home, where, leaving me discrowned
And desolate, for ever you will stay,
Motherless children ! And I go my way
To other lands, an exile, ere you bring
Your fruits home, ere I see you prospering
Or know your brides, or deck the bridal bed,
All flowers, and lift your torches overhead.

Oh, cursèd be mine own hard heart ! 'Twas all
In vain, then, that I reared you up, so tall
And fair ; in vain I bore you, and was torn
With those long pitiless pains, when you were
born.

Ah, wondrous hopes my poor heart had in you,
How you would tend me in mine age, and do
The shroud about me with your own dear hands,
When I lay cold, blessèd in all the lands
That knew us. And that gentle thought is dead !
You go, and I live on, to eat the bread
Of long years, to myself most full of pain.
And never your dear eyes, never again,
Shall see your mother, far away being thrown
To other shapes of life. . . . My babes, my own,
Why gaze ye so ?—What is it that ye see ?—
And laugh with that last laughter ? . . . Woe is me,
What shall I do ?

Women, my strength is gone,
Gone like a dream, since once I looked upon

Those shining faces. . . . I can do it not.
 Good-bye to all the thoughts that burned so hot
 Aforetime ! I will take and hide them far,
 Far, from men's eyes. Why should I seek a war
 So blind : by these babes' wounds to sting again
 Their father's heart, and win myself a pain
 Twice deeper ? Never, never ! I forget
 Henceforward all I laboured for.

And yet,
 What is it with me ? Would I be a thing
 Mocked at, and leave mine enemies to sting
 Unsmitten ? It must be. O coward heart,
 Ever to harbour such soft words !—Depart
 Out of my sight, ye twain. [*The CHILDREN go in.*]

And they whose eyes
 Shall hold it sin to share my sacrifice,
 On their heads be it ! My hand shall swerve not
 now.

Ah, Ah, thou Wrath within me ! Do not thou,
 Do not. . . . Down, down, thou tortured thing, and
 spare
 My children ! They will dwell with us, aye, there
 Far off, and give thee peace.

Too late, too late !
 By all Hell's living agonies of hate,
 They shall not take my little ones alive
 To make their mock with ! Howsoe'er I strive
 The thing is doomed ; it shall not escape now
 From being. Aye, the crown is on the brow,
 And the robe girt, and in the robe that high
 Queen dying.

I know all. Yet . . . seeing that I

Must go so long a journey, and these twain
 A longer yet and darker, I would fain
 Speak with them, ere I go.

[A handmaid brings the CHILDREN out again.]

Come, children ; stand
 A little from me. There. Reach out your hand,
 Your right hand—so—to mother : and good-bye !

*[She has kept them hitherto at arm's-length :
 but at the touch of their hands, her resolu-
 tion breaks down, and she gathers them
 passionately into her arms.]*

Oh, darling hand ! Oh, darling mouth, and eye,
 And royal mien, and bright brave faces clear,
 May you be blessèd, but not here ! What here
 Was yours, your father stole. . . . Ah God, the glow
 Of cheek on cheek, the tender touch ; and Oh,
 Sweet scent of childhood. . . . Go ! Go ! . . . Am I
 blind ? . . .

Mine eyes can see not, when I look to find
 Their places. I am broken by the wings
 Of evil. . . . Yea, I know to what bad things
 I go, but louder than all thought doth cry
 Anger, which maketh man's worst misery.

[She follows the CHILDREN into the house.]

CHORUS.

My thoughts have roamed a cloudy land,
 And heard a fierier music fall
 Than woman's heart should stir withal :
 And yet some Muse majestic,
 Unknown, hath hold of woman's hand,
 Seeking for Wisdom—not in all :

A feeble seed, a scattered band,
Thou yet shalt find in lonely places,
Not dead amongst us, nor our faces
Turned away from the Muses' call.

And thus my thought would speak : that she
Who ne'er hath borne a child nor known
Is nearer to felicity :
Unlit she goeth and alone,
With little understanding what
A child's touch means of joy or woe,
And many toils she beareth not.

But they within whose garden fair
That gentle plant hath blown, they go
Deep-written all their days with care—
To rear the children, to make fast
Their hold, to win them wealth ; and then
Much darkness, if the seed at last
Bear fruit in good or evil men !
And one thing at the end of all
Abideth, that which all men dread :
The wealth is won, the limbs are bred
To manhood, and the heart withal
Honest : and, lo, where Fortune smiled,
Some change, and what hath fallen ? Hark !
'Tis death slow winging to the dark,
And in his arms what was thy child.

What therefore doth it bring of gain
To man, whose cup stood full before,

That God should send this one thing more
Of hunger and of dread, a door
Set wide to every wind of pain?

[MEDEA comes out alone from the house.]

MEDEA.

Friends, this long hour I wait on Fortune's eyes,
And strain my senses in a hot surmise
What passeth on that hill.—Ha! even now
There comes . . . 'tis one of Jason's men, I trow.
His wild-perturb'd breath doth warrant me
The tidings of some strange calamity.

[Enter MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER.

O dire and ghastly deed! Get thee away,
Medea! Fly! Nor let behind thee stay
One chariot's wing, one keel that sweeps the seas. . . .

MEDEA.

And what hath chanced, to cause such flights as these?

MESSENGER.

The maiden princess lieth—and her sire,
The king—both murdered by thy poison-fire.

MEDEA.

Most happy tiding! Which thy name prefers
Henceforth among my friends and well-wishers.

MESSENGER.

What say'st thou? Woman, is thy mind within
Clear, and not raving? Thou art found in sin
Most bloody wrought against the king's high head,
And laughest at the tale, and hast no dread?

MEDEA.

I have words also that could answer well
Thy word. But take thine ease, good friend, and tell,
How died they? Hath it been a very foul
Death, prithee? That were comfort to my soul.

MESSENGER.

When thy two children, hand in hand entwined,
Came with their father, and passed on to find
The new-made bridal rooms, Oh, we were glad,
We thralls, who ever loved thee well, and had
Grief in thy grief. And straight there passed a word
From ear to ear, that thou and thy false lord
Had poured peace offering upon wrath foregone.
A right glad welcome gave we them, and one
Kissed the small hand, and one the shining hair:
Myself, for very joy, I followed where
The women's rooms are. There our mistress . . . she
Whom now we name so . . . thinking not to see
Thy little pair, with glad and eager brow
Sate waiting Jason. Then she saw, and slow
Shrouded her eyes, and backward turned again,
Sick that thy children should come near her. Then

Thy husband quick went forward, to entreat
The young maid's fitful wrath. "Thou wilt not
meet

Love's coming with unkindness? Nay, refrain
Thy suddenness, and turn thy face again,
Holding as friends all that to me are dear,
Thine husband. And accept these robes they bear
As gifts : and beg thy father to unmake
His doom of exile on them—for my sake."

When once she saw the raiment, she could still
Her joy no more, but gave him all his will.
And almost ere the father and the two
Children were gone from out the room, she drew
The flowerèd garments forth, and sate her down
To her arraying : bound the golden crown
Through her long curls, and in a mirror fair
Arranged their separate clusters, smiling there
At the dead self that faced her. Then aside
She pushed her seat, and paced those chambers
wide

Alone, her white foot poising delicately—
So passing joyful in those gifts was she !—
And many a time would pause, straight-limbed, and
wheel

Her head to watch the long fold to her heel
Sweeping. And then came something strange. Her
cheek

Seemed pale, and back with crooked steps and
weak

Groping of arms she walked, and scarcely found
Her old seat, that she fell not to the ground.

Among the handmaids was a woman old
And grey, who deemed, I think, that Pan had hold

Upon her, or some spirit, and raised a keen
Awakening shout ; till through her lips was seen
A white foam crawling, and her eyeballs back
Twisted, and all her face dead pale for lack
Of life : and while that old dame called, the cry
Turned strangely to its opposite, to die
Sobbing. Oh, swiftly then one woman flew
To seek her father's rooms, one for the new
Bridegroom, to tell the tale. And all the place
Was loud with hurrying feet.

So long a space

As a swift walker on a measured way
Would pace a furlong's course in, there she lay
Speechless, with veiled lids. Then wide her eyes
She oped, and wildly, as she strove to rise,
Shrieked : for two diverse waves upon her rolled
Of stabbing death. The carcanet of gold
That gripped her brow was molten in a dire
And wondrous river of devouring fire.
And those fine robes, the gift thy children gave—
God's mercy !—everywhere did lap and lave
The delicate flesh ; till up she sprang, and fled,
A fiery pillar, shaking locks and head
This way and that, seeking to cast the crown
Somewhere away. But like a thing nailed down
The burning gold held fast the anadem,
And through her locks, the more she scattered
them,
Came fire the fiercer, till to earth she fell
A thing—save to her sire—scarce nameable,
And strove no more. That cheek of royal mien,
Where was it—or the place where eyes had
been ?

Only from crown and temples came faint blood
Shot through with fire. The very flesh, it stood
Out from the bones, as from a wounded pine
The gum starts, where those gnawing poisons fine
Bit in the dark—a ghastly sight ! And touch
The dead we durst not. We had seen too much.

But that poor father, knowing not, had sped,
Swift to his daughter's room, and there the dead
Lay at his feet. He knelt, and groaning low,
Folded her in his arms, and kissed her : “ Oh,
Unhappy child, what thing unnatural hath
So hideously undone thee ? Or what wrath
Of gods, to make this old grey sepulchre
Childless of thee ? Would God but lay me there
To die with thee, my daughter ! ” So he cried.
But after, when he stayed from tears, and tried
To uplift his old bent frame, lo, in the folds
Of those fine robes it held, as ivy holds
Strangling among young laurel boughs. Oh, then
A ghastly struggle came ! Again, again,
Up on his knee he writhed ; but that dead breast
Clung still to his : till, wild, like one possessed,
He dragged himself half free ; and, lo, the live
Flesh parted ; and he laid him down to strive
No more with death, but perish ; for the deep
Had risen above his soul. And there they sleep,
At last, the old proud father and the bride,
Even as his tears had craved it, side by side.

For thee—Oh, no word more ! Thyself will
know

How best to baffle vengeance. . . . Long ago
I looked upon man's days, and found a grey
Shadow. And this thing more I surely say,

That those of all men who are counted wise,
Strong wits, devisers of great policies,
Do pay the bitterest toll. Since life began,
Hath there in God's eye stood one happy man ?
Fair days roll on, and bear more gifts or less
Of fortune, but to no man happiness.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.]

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Wrath upon wrath, meseems, this day shall fall
From God on Jason ! He hath earned it all.

Other Women.

O miserable maiden, all my heart
Is torn for thee, so sudden to depart
From thy king's chambers and the light above
To darkness, all for sake of Jason's love !

MEDEA.

Women, my mind is clear. I go to slay
My children with all speed, and then, away
From hence ; not wait yet longer till they stand
Beneath another and an angrier hand
To die. Yea, howsoe'er I shield them, die
They must. And, seeing that they must, 'tis I
Shall slay them, I their mother, touched of none
Beside. Oh, up, and get thine armour on,

My heart ! Why longer tarry we to win
Our crown of dire inevitable sin ?
Take up thy sword, O poor right hand of mine,
Thy sword : then onward to the thin-drawn line
Where life turns agony. Let there be naught
Of softness now : and keep thee from that thought,
'Born of thy flesh,' 'thine own belovèd.' Now,
For one brief day, forget thy children : thou
Shalt weep hereafter. Though thou slay them, yet
Sweet were they. . . . I am sore unfortunate.
[She goes into the house.]

CHORUS.

Some Women.

O Earth, our mother ; and thou
All-seër, arrowy crown
Of Sunlight, manward now
Look down, Oh, look down !
Look upon one accurst,
Ere yet in blood she twine
Red hands—blood that is thine !
O Sun, save her first !
She is thy daughter still,
Of thine own golden line ;
Save her ! Or shall man spill
The life divine ?
Give peace, O Fire that diest not ! Send thy spell
To stay her yet, to lift her afar, afar—
A torture-changèd spirit, a voice of Hell
Wrought of old wrongs and war !

Others.

Alas for the mother's pain
 Wasted ! Alas the dear
 Life that was born in vain !
 Woman, what mak'st thou here,
 Thou from beyond the Gate
 Where dim Symplêgades
 Clash in the dark blue seas,
 The shores where death doth wait ?
 Why hast thou taken on thee,
 To make us desolate,
 This anger of misery
 And guilt of hate ?

For fierce are the smittings back of blood once shed
 Where love hath been : God's wrath upon them
 that kill,
 And an anguished earth, and the wonder of the dead
 Haunting as music still. . . .

[A cry is heard within.]

A Woman.

Hark ! Did ye hear ? Heard ye the children's cry ?

Another.

O miserable woman ! O abhorred !

A Child within.

What shall I do ? What is it ? Keep me fast
 From mother !

The Other Child.

I know nothing. Brother ! Oh,
 I think she means to kill us.

A Woman.

Let me go !

I will—Help ! Help !—and save them at the last.

A Child.

Yes, in God's name ! Help quickly ere we die !

The Other Child.

She has almost caught me now. She has a sword.

[*Many of the Women are now beating at the barred door to get in. Others are standing apart.*]

Women at the door.

Thou stone, thou thing of iron ! Wilt verily
Spill with thine hand that life, the vintage stored
Of thine own agony ?

The Other Women

A Mother slew her babes in days of yore,
One, only one, from dawn to eventide,
Ino, god-maddened, whom the Queen of Heaven
Set frenzied, flying to the dark : and she
Cast her for sorrow to the wide salt sea,
Forth from those rooms of murder unforgiven,
Wild-footed from a white crag of the shore,
And clasping still her children twain, she died.

O Love of Woman, charged with sorrow sore,
What hast thou wrought upon us ? What beside
Resteth to tremble for ?

[*Enter hurriedly JASON and Attendants.*]

JASON.

Ye women by this doorway clustering
Speak, is the doer of the ghastly thing
Yet here, or fled? What hopeth she of flight?
Shall the deep yawn to shield her? Shall the height
Send wings, and hide her in the vaulted sky
To work red murder on her lords, and fly
Unrecompensed? But let her go! My care
Is but to save my children, not for her.
Let them she wronged requite her as they may.
I care not. 'Tis my sons I must some way
Save, ere the kinsmen of the dead can win
From them the payment of their mother's sin.

LEADER.

Unhappy man, indeed thou knowest not
What dark place thou art come to! Else, God
wot,
Jason, no word like these could fall from thee.

JASON.

What is it?—Ha! The woman would kill me?

LEADER.

Thy sons are dead, slain by their mother's hand.

JASON.

How? Not the children. . . . I scarce under-
stand. . . .
O God, thou hast broken me!

LEADER.

Think of those twain
As things once fair, that ne'er shall bloom again.

JASON.

Where did she murder them? In that old room?

LEADER.

Open, and thou shalt see thy children's doom.

JASON.

Ho, thralls! Unloose me yonder bars! Make more
Of speed! Wrench out the jointing of the door.
And show my two-edged curse, the children dead,
The woman. . . . Oh, this sword upon her
head. . . .

*[While the Attendants are still battering at
the door MEDEA appears on the roof,
standing on a chariot of winged Dragons,
in which are the children's bodies.]*

MEDEA.

What make ye at my gates? Why batter ye
With brazen bars, seeking the dead and me
Who slew them? Peace! . . . And thou, if aught
of mine
Thou needest, speak, though never touch of thine

Shall scathe me more. Out of his firmament
My fathers' father, the high Sun, hath sent
This, that shall save me from mine enemies' rage.

JASON.

Thou living hate ! Thou wife in every age
Abhorred, blood-red mother, who didst kill
My sons, and make me as the dead : and still
Canst take the sunshine to thine eyes, and smell
The green earth, reeking from thy deed of hell ;
I curse thee ! Now, Oh, now mine eyes can see,
That then were blinded, when from savagery
Of eastern chambers, from a cruel land,
To Greece and home I gathered in mine hand
Thee, thou incarnate curse : one that betrayed
Her home, her father, her . . . Oh, God hath
laid

Thy sins on me !—I knew, I knew, there lay
A brother murdered on thy hearth that day
When thy first footstep fell on Argo's hull. . .
Argo, my own, my swift and beautiful !

That was her first beginning. Then a wife
I made her in my house. She bore to life
Children : and now for love, for chambering
And men's arms, she hath murdered them ! A
thing

Not one of all the maids of Greece, not one,
Had dreamed of ; whom I spurned, and for mine
own

Chose thee, a bride of hate to me and death,
Tigress, not woman, beast of wilder breath

Than Skylla shrieking o'er the Tuscan sea.
Enough ! No scorn of mine can reach to thee,
Such iron is o'er thine eyes. Out from my road,
Thou crime-begetter, blind with children's blood !
And let me weep alone the bitter tide
That sweepeth Jason's days, no gentle bride
To speak with more, no child to look upon
Whom once I reared . . . all, all for ever gone !

MEDEA.

An easy answer had I to this swell
Of speech, but Zeus our father knoweth well,
All I for thee have wrought, and thou for me.
So let it rest. This thing was not to be,
That thou shouldst live a merry life, my bed
Forgotten and my heart uncomforted,
Thou nor thy princess: nor the king that planned
Thy marriage drive Medea from his land,
And suffer not. Call me what thing thou please,
Tigress or Skylla from the Tuscan seas :
My claws have gripped thine heart, and all things
shine.

JASON.

Thou too hast grief. Thy pain is fierce as mine.

MEDEA.

I love the pain, so thou shalt laugh no more.

JASON.

Oh, what a womb of sin my children bore !

MEDEA.

Sons, did ye perish for your father's shame ?

JASON.

How ? It was not my hand that murdered them.

MEDEA.

'Twas thy false wooings, 'twas thy trampling pride.

JASON.

Thou hast said it ! For thy lust of love they died.

MEDEA.

And love to women a slight thing should be ?

JASON.

To women pure !—All thy vile life to thee !

MEDEA.

Think of thy torment. They are dead, they are dead !

JASON.

No : quick, great God ; quick curses round thy head !

MEDEA.

The Gods know who began this work of woe.

JASON.

Thy heart and all its loathliness they know.

MEDEA.

Loathe on. . . . But, Oh, thy voice. It hurts me
sore.

JASON.

Aye, and thine me. Wouldst hear me then no more?

MEDEA.

How? Show me but the way. 'Tis this I crave.

JASON.

Give me the dead to weep, and make their grave.

MEDEA.

Never! Myself will lay them in a still
Green sepulchre, where Hera by the Hill
Hath precinct holy, that no angry men
May break their graves and cast them forth again
To evil. So I lay on all this shore
Of Corinth a high feast for evermore
And rite, to purge them yearly of the stain
Of this poor blood. And I, to Pallas' plain
I go, to dwell beside Pandion's son,
Aegeus.—For thee, behold, death draweth on,
Evil and lonely, like thine heart: the hands
Of thine old Argo, rotting where she stands,

Shall smite thine head in twain, and bitter be
To the last end thy memories of me.

[She rises on the chariot and is slowly borne away.]

JASON.

May They that hear the weeping child
Blast thee, and They that walk in blood !

MEDEA.

Thy broken vows, thy friends beguiled
Have shut for thee the ears of God.

JASON.

Go, thou art wet with children's tears !

MEDEA.

Go thou, and lay thy bride to sleep.

JASON.

Childless, I go, to weep and weep.

MEDEA.

Not yet ! Age cometh and long years.

JASON.

My sons, mine own !

MEDEA.

Not thine, but mine . . .

JASON.

. . . Who slew them !

MEDEA.

Yes : to torture thee.

JASON.

Once let me kiss their lips, once twine
Mine arms and touch. . . . Ah, woe is me !

MEDEA.

Wouldst love them and entreat? But now
They were as nothing.

JASON.

At the last,
O God, to touch that tender brow!

MEDEA.

Thy words upon the wind are cast.

JASON.

Thou, Zeus, wilt hear me. All is said
For naught. I am but spurned away
And trampled by this tigress, red
With children's blood. Yet, come what may,
So far as thou hast granted, yea,
So far as yet my strength may stand,
I weep upon these dead, and say
Their last farewell, and raise my hand

To all the daemons of the air
In witness of these things; how she
Who slew them, will not suffer me
To gather up my babes, nor bear
To earth their bodies; whom, O stone
Of women, would I ne'er had known
Nor gotten, to be slain by thee!
[He casts himself upon the earth.]

CHORUS.

Great treasure halls hath Zeus in heaven,
From whence to man strange dooms be given,
 Past hope or fear.
And the end men looked for cometh not,
And a path is there where no man thought :
 So hath it fallen here.

NOTES TO MEDEA

P. 3, l. 2, To Colchis through the blue Symplêgades.]—The Symplêgades ("Clashing") or Kuaneai ("Dark blue") were two rocks in the sea which used to clash together and crush anything that was between them. They stood above the north end of the Bosphorus and formed the Gate (l. 1264, p. 70) to the Axeinos Pontos, or "Stranger-less Sea," where all Greeks were murdered. At the farthest eastern end of that sea was the land of Colchis.

P. 3, l. 3, Pêlion.]—The great mountain in Thessaly. Iôlcos, a little kingdom between Pêlion and the sea, ruled originally by Aeson, Jason's father, then by the usurping Pëlias.

P. 3, l. 9, Daughters of Pëlias.]—See Introduction, p. vii.

P. 4, l. 18, Wed.]—Medea was not legally married to Jason, and could not be, though in common parlance he is sometimes called her husband. Inter-marriage between the subjects of two separate states was not possible in antiquity without a special treaty. And naturally there was no such treaty with Colchis.

This is, I think, the view of the play, and corresponds to the normal Athenian conceptions of society. In the original legend it is likely enough that Medea belongs to "matriarchal" times before the institution of marriage.

P. 4, l. 18, Head of Corinth.]—A peculiar word

(*αἰσχυμῶν*) afterwards used to translate the Roman *dictator*. Creon is, however, apparently descended from the ancient king Sisyphus.

P. 4, l. 40, She hath a blade made keen, &c.]—These lines (40, 41) are repeated in a different context later on, p. 23, ll. 379, 380. The sword which to the Nurse suggested suicide was really meant for murder. There is a similar and equally dramatic repetition of the lines about the crown and wreath (786, 949, pp. 46, 54), and of those about the various characters popularly attributed to Medea (ll. 304, 808, pp. 18, 46).

P. 5, l. 48, ATTENDANT.]—Greek *Paidagōgos*, or “pedagogue”; a confidential servant who escorted the boys to and from school, and in similar ways looked after them. Notice the rather light and cynical character of this man, compared with the tenderness of the Nurse.

P. 5, l. 57, To this still earth and sky.]—Not a mere stage explanation. It was the ancient practice, if you had bad dreams or terrors of the night, to “show” them to the Sun in the morning, that he might clear them away.

P. 8, l. 111, Have I not suffered?]—Medea is apparently answering some would-be comforter. Cf. p. 4. (“If friends will speak,” &c.)

P. 9, l. 131, CHORUS.]—As Dr. Verrall has remarked, the presence of the Chorus is in this play unusually awkward from the dramatic point of view. Medea’s plot demands most absolute secrecy; and it is incredible that fifteen Corinthian women, simply because they were women, should allow a half-mad foreigner to murder several people, including their own Corinthian king and princess—who was a

woman also—rather than reveal her plot. We must remember in palliation (1) that these women belong to the faction in Corinth which was friendly to Medea and hostile to Creon; (2) that the appeal to them as women had more force in antiquity than it would now, and the princess had really turned traitor to her sex. (See note on this subject at the end of the present writer's translation of the *Electra*.) (3) The non-interference of the Chorus seems monstrous: yet in ancient times, when law was weak and punishment was chiefly the concern of the injured persons, and of no one else, the reluctance of bystanders to interfere was much greater than it is now in an ordered society. Some oriental countries, and perhaps even California or Texas, could afford us some startling instances of impassiveness among bystanders.

P. 12, l. 167, Oh, wild words!—The Nurse breaks in, hoping to drown her mistress's dangerous self-betrayal. Medea's murder of her brother (see Introduction, p. vi) was by ordinary standards her worst act, and seems not to have been known in Corinth. It forms the climax of Jason's denunciation, l. 1334, p. 74.

P. 13, l. 190, Alas, the brave blithe bards, &c.]—Who is the speaker? According to the MSS. the Nurse, and there is some difficulty in taking the lines from her. Yet (1) she has no reason to sing a song outside after saying that she is going in; and (2) it is quite necessary that she should take a little time indoors persuading Medea to come out. The words seem to suit the lips of an impersonal Chorus.

The general sense of the poem is interesting. It is

an apology for tragedy. It gives the tragic poet's conception of the place of his art in the service of humanity, as against the usual feeling of the public, whose serious work is devoted to something else, and who "go to a play to be amused."

P. 14, l. 214, Women of Corinth, I am come, &c.]—These opening lines are a well-known *crux interpretum*. It is interesting to note, (1) that the Roman poet Ennius (ca. 200 B.C.) who translated the *Medea*, did not understand them in the least; while, on the other hand, the earliest Greek commentators seem not to have noticed that there was any difficulty in them worth commenting upon. That implies that while the acting tradition was alive and unbroken, the lines were easily understood; but when once the tradition failed, the meaning was lost. (The first commentator who deals with the passage is Irenaeus, a scholar of the Augustan time.)

P. 15, l. 231, A herb most bruised is woman.]—This fine statement of the wrongs of women in Athens doubtless contains a great deal of the poet's own mind; but from the dramatic point of view it is justified in several ways. (1) Medea is seeking for a common ground on which to appeal to the Corinthian women. (2) She herself is now in the position of all others in which a woman is most hardly treated as compared with a man. (3) Besides this, one can see that, being a person of great powers and vehement will, she feels keenly her lack of outlet. If she had men's work to do, she could be a hero: debarred from proper action (from τὸ πράσσειν, *Hip.* 1019) she is bound to make mischief. Cf. p. 24, ll. 408, 409. "Things most vain, &c."

There is a slight anachronism in applying the Attic system of doweries to primitive times. Medea's contemporaries either lived in a "matriarchal" system without any marriage, or else were bought by their husbands for so many cows.

P. 17, l. 271, CREON.]—Observe the somewhat archaic abruptness of this scene, a sign of the early date of the play.

P. 18, l. 295, Wise beyond men's wont.]—Medea was a "wise woman," which in her time meant much the same as a witch or enchantress. She did really know more than other women; but most of this extra knowledge consisted—or was supposed to consist—either in lore of poisons and charms, or in useless learning and speculation.

P. 18, l. 304, A seed of strife, an Eastern dreamer, &c.]—The meaning of these various "ill names" is not certain. Cf. l. 808, p. 46. Most scholars take *θατέρου τρόπου* ("of the other sort") to mean "the opposite of a dreamer."

P. 20, ll. 333-4, What would I with thy pains?]—A conceit almost in the Elizabethan style, as if by taking "pains" away from Creon, she would have them herself.

P. 20, l. 335, Not that! Not that!]—Observe what a dislike Medea has of being touched: cf. l. 370 ("my flesh been never stained," &c.) and l. 496 ("poor, poor right hand of mine!"), pp. 22, and 28.

P. 22, l. 364, Defeat on every side.]—Observe (1) that in this speech Medea's vengeance is to take the form of a clear fight to the death against the three guilty persons. It is both courageous and,

judged by the appropriate standard, just. (2) She wants to save her own life, not from cowardice, but simply to make her revenge more complete. To kill her enemies and escape is victory. To kill them and die with them is only a drawn battle. Other enemies will live and "laugh." (3) Already in this first soliloquy there is a suggestion of that strain of madness which becomes unmistakable later on in the play. ("Oh, I have tried so many thoughts of murder," &c., and especially the lashing of her own fury, "Awake thee now, Medea.")

P. 24, l. 405, Thief's daughter: lit. "a child of Sisyphus."—Sisyphus, an ancient king of Corinth, was one of the well-known sinners punished in Tartarus. Medea's father, Aiêtês, was a brother of Circe, and born of the Sun.

P. 24, l. 409, Things most vain for help.]—See on ll. 230 ff.

P. 24, ll. 410-430, CHORUS.]—The song celebrates the coming triumph of Woman in her rebellion against Man; not by any means Woman as typifying the domestic virtues, but rather as the downtrodden, uncivilised, unreasoning, and fiercely emotional half of humanity. A woman who in defence of her honour and her rights will die sword in hand, slaying the man who wronged her, seems to the Chorus like a deliverer of the whole sex.

P. 24, l. 421, Old bards.]—Early literature in most countries contains a good deal of heavy satire on women: *e.g.* Hesiod's "Who trusts a woman trusts a thief;" or Phocylides' "Two days of a woman are very sweet: when you marry her and when you carry her to her grave."

It is curious how the four main Choruses of the *Medea* are divided each into two parts, distinct in subject and in metre.

P. 25, l. 439, Faith is no more sweet.]—Copied from a beautiful passage in Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 198 ff.: "There shall be no more sweetness found in the faithful man nor the righteous. . . . And at last up to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth, shrouding with white raiment their beautiful faces, go Ruth and Rebuking." (Aidos and Nemesis: *i.e.* the Ruth or Shame that you feel with reference to your own actions, and the Indignation or Disapproval that others feel.)

P. 27, ll. 478 ff., Bulls of fiery breath.]—Among the tasks set him by Aiêtês, Jason had to yoke two fire-breathing bulls, and plough with them a certain Field of Ares, sow the field with dragon's teeth, and reap a harvest of earth-born or giant warriors which sprang from the seed. When all this was done, there remained the ancient serpent coiled round the tree where the Golden Fleece was hanging.

P. 29, l. 507, The first friends who sheltered me.]—*i.e.* the kindred of Pelias.

P. 29, l. 509, Blest of many a maid in Hellas.]—Jason was, of course, the great romantic hero of his time. Cf. his own words, l. 1340, p. 74.

Pp. 29 ff., ll. 523–575.—Jason's defence is made the weaker by his reluctance to be definitely insulting to Medea. He dares not say: "You think that, because you conceived a violent passion for me,—to which, I admit, I partly responded—I must live with you always; but the truth is, you are a savage with whom a civilised man cannot go on living." This

point comes out unveiled in his later speech, l. 1329 ff., p. 74.

P. 30, ll. 536 ff., Our ordered life and justice.]—Jason has brought the benefits of civilisation to Medea! He is doubtless sincere, but the peculiar ironic cruelty of the plea is obvious.

P. 30, ll. 541 ff., The story of Great Medea, &c. . . . Unless our deeds have glory.]—This, I think, is absolutely sincere. To Jason ambition is everything. And, as Medea has largely shared his great deeds with him, he thinks that she cannot but feel the same. It seems to him contemptible that her mere craving for personal love should outweigh all the possible glories of life.

P. 31, l. 565, What more need hast thou of children?}]—He only means, “of more children than you now have.” But the words suggest to Medea a different meaning, and sow in her mind the first seed of the child-murder. See on the *Aegeus* scene below.

P. 34, l. 608, A living curse.]—Though she spoke no word, the existence of a being so deeply wronged would be a curse on her oppressors. So a murdered man's blood, or an involuntary cry of pain (*Aesch. Ag.* 237) on the part of an injured person is in itself fraught with a curse.

P. 35, ll. 627–641, CHORUS. Alas, the Love, &c.]—A highly characteristic Euripidean poem, keenly observant of fact, yet with a lyrical note penetrating all its realism. A love which really produces “good to man and glory,” is treated in the next chorus, l. 844 ff., p. 49.

Pp. 37 ff., ll. 663–759, *AEGEUS*.]—This scene is generally considered to be a mere blot on the play,

not, I think, justly. It is argued that the obvious purpose which the scene serves, the provision of an asylum for Medea, has no keen dramatic interest. The spectator would just as soon, or sooner, have her die. And, besides, her actual mode of escape is largely independent of Aegeus. Further, the arrival of Aegeus at this moment seems to be a mere coincidence (*Ar. Poetics*, 61 b, 23), and one cannot help suspecting that the Athenian poet was influenced by mere local interests in dragging in the Athenian king and the praises of Athens where they were not specially appropriate.

To these criticisms one may make some answer. (1) As to the coincidence, it is important to remember always that Greek tragedies are primarily historical plays, not works of fiction. They are based on definite *Logoi* or traditions (*Frogs*, l. 1052, p. 254) and therefore can, and should, represent accidental coincidences when it was a datum of the tradition that these coincidences actually happened. By Aristotle's time the practice had changed. The tragedies of his age were essentially fiction; and he tends to criticise the ancient tragedies by fictional standards.

Now it was certainly a datum in the Medea legend that she took refuge with Aegeus, King of Athens, and was afterwards an enemy to his son Theseus; but I think we may go further. This play pretty certainly has for its foundation the rites performed by the Corinthians at the Grave of the Children of Medea in the precinct of Hera Acraia near Corinth. See on l. 1379, p. 77. The legend in such cases is usually invented to explain the ritual; and I suspect that in the ritual, and,

consequently, in the legend, there were two other data : first, a pursuit of Medea and her flight on a dragon-chariot, and, secondly, a meeting between Medea and Aegeus. (Both subjects are frequent on vase paintings, and may well be derived from historical pictures in some temple at Corinth.)

Thus, the meeting with Aegeus is probably not the free invention of Euripides, but one of the data supplied to him by his subject. But he has made it serve, as von Arnim was the first to perceive, a remarkable dramatic purpose. Aegeus was under a curse of childlessness, and his desolate condition suggests to Medea the ultimate form of her vengeance. She will make Jason childless. Cf. l. 670, "Children! Ah God, art childless?" (A childless king in antiquity was a miserable object : likely to be deposed and dishonoured, and to miss his due worship after death. See the fragments of Euripides' *Oineus*.)

There is also a further purpose in the scene, of a curious and characteristic kind. In several plays of Euripides, when a heroine hesitates on the verge of a crime, the thing that drives her over the brink is some sudden and violent lowering of her self-respect. Thus Phædra writes her false letter immediately after her public shame. Creûsa in the *Ion* turns murderous only after crying in the god's ears the story of her seduction. Medea, a princess and, as we have seen, a woman of rather proud chastity, feels, after the offer which she makes to Aegeus in this scene (l. 716 ff., p. 42), that she need shrink from nothing.

P. 38, l. 681, [The hearth-stone of my sires of yore.] —This sounds as if it meant Aegeus' own house : in reality, by an oracular riddle, it meant the house of

Pittheus, by whose daughter, Aethra, Aegeus became the father of Theseus.

P. 43, l. 731, An oath wherein to trust.]—Observe that Medea is deceiving Aegeus. She intends to commit a murder before going to him, and therefore wishes to bind him down so firmly that, however much he wish to repudiate her, he shall be unable. Hence this insistence on the oath and the exact form of the oath. (At this time, apparently, she scarcely thinks of the children, only of her revenge.)

P. 46, l. 808, No eastern dreamer, &c.]—See on l. 304.

P. 47, l. 820, *The NURSE comes out.*]—There is no indication in the original to show who comes out. But it is certainly a woman ; as certainly it is not one of the Chorus ; and Medea's words suit the Nurse well. It is an almost devilish act to send the Nurse, who would have died rather than take such a message had she understood it.

P. 48, ll. 824–846, The sons of Erechtheus, &c.]—This poem is interesting as showing the ideal conception of Athens entertained by a fifth-century Athenian. One might compare with it Pericles' famous speech in Thucydides, ii., where the emphasis is laid on Athenian "plain living and high thinking" and the freedom of daily life. Or, again, the speeches of Aethra in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, where more stress is laid on mercy and championship of the oppressed.

The allegory of "Harmony," as a sort of Korê, or Earth-maiden, planted by all the Muses in the soil of Attica, seems to be an invention of the poet. Not any given Art or Muse, but a spirit which unites and

harmonises all, is the special spirit of Athens. The Attic connection with Erôs, on the other hand, is old and traditional. But Euripides has transformed the primitive nature-god into a mystic and passionate longing for "all manner of high deed," a Love which, different from that described in the preceding chorus, really ennobles human life.

This first part of the Chorus is, of course, suggested by Aegeus; the second is more closely connected with the action of the play. "How can Medea dream of asking that stainless land to shelter her crimes? But the whole plan of her revenge is not only wicked but impossible. She simply could not do such a thing, if she tried."

Pp. 50 ff., l. 869, The second scene with Jason.]—Dicæarchus, and perhaps his master Aristotle also, seems to have complained of Medea's bursting into tears in this scene, instead of acting her part consistently—a very prejudiced criticism. What strikes one about Medea's assumed rôle is that in it she remains so like herself and so unlike another woman. Had she really determined to yield to Jason, she would have done so in just this way, keen-sighted and yet passionate. One is reminded of the deceits of half-insane persons, which are due not so much to conscious art as to the emergence of another side of the personality.

P. 54, l. 949, Fine robings, &c.]—Repeated from l. 786, p. 46, where it came full in the midst of Medea's avowal of her murderous purpose. It startles one here, almost as though she had spoken out the word "murder" in some way which Jason could not understand.

P. 56, l. 976, CHORUS.]—The inaction of the Chorus women during the last scene will not bear thinking about, if we regard them as real human beings, like, for instance, the Bacchæ and the Trojan Women in the plays that bear their name. Still there is not only beauty, but, I think, great dramatic value in the conventional and almost mystical quality of this Chorus, and also in the low and quiet tone of that which follows, l. 1081 ff.

P. 59, ll. 1021 ff., Why does Medea kill her children?—She acts not for one clearly stated reason, like a heroine in Sardou, but for many reasons, both conscious and subconscious, as people do in real life. Any analysis professing to be exact would be misleading, but one may note some elements in her feeling: (1) She had played dangerously long with the notion of making Jason childless. (2) When she repented of this (l. 1046, p. 60) the children had already been made the unconscious murderers of the princess. They were certain to be slain, perhaps with tortures, by the royal kindred. (3) Medea might take them with her to Athens and trust to the hope of Aegeus' being able and willing to protect them. But it was a doubtful chance, and she would certainly be in a position of weakness and inferiority if she had the children to protect. (4) In the midst of her passionate half-animal love for the children, there was also an element of hatred, because they were Jason's: cf. l. 112, p. 8. (5) She also seems to feel, in a sort of wild-beast way, that by killing them she makes them more her own: cf. l. 793, p. 46, "Mine, whom no hand shall steal from me away;" l. 1241, p. 68, "touched of none beside." (6)

Euripides had apparently observed how common it is, when a woman's mind is deranged by suffering, that her madness takes the form of child-murder. The terrible lines in which Medea speaks to the "Wrath" within her, as if it were a separate being (l. 1056, p. 60), seem to bear out this view.

P. 59, l. 1038, Other shapes of life.]—A mystical conception of death. Cf. *Ion*, 1067, where almost exactly the same phrase is used.

P. 61, l. 1078, I know to what bad deeds, &c.]—This expression of double consciousness was immensely famous in antiquity. It is quoted by Lucian, Plutarch, Clement, Galen, Synesius, Hierocles, Arrian, Simplicius, besides being imitated, e.g. by Ovid: "video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor."

P. 63, l. 1123 ff., MESSENGER.]—A pendant to the Attendant's entrance above, l. 1002. The Attendant, bringing apparently good news, is received with a moan of despair, the Messenger of calamity with serene satisfaction. Cf. the Messenger who announces the death of Pentheus in the *Bacchæ*.

P. 65, l. 1162, Dead self.]—The reflection in the glass, often regarded as ominous or uncanny in some way.

P. 66, l. 1176, The cry turned strangely to its opposite.]—The notion was that an evil spirit could be scared away by loud cheerful shouts—*ololugæ*. But while this old woman is making an *ololugê*, she sees that the trouble is graver than she thought, and the cheerful cry turns into a wail.

P. 68, l. 1236, Women, my mind is clear.]—With the silence in which Medea passes over the success of her vengeance compare Theseus' words, *Hip.*,

l. 1260, "I laugh not, neither weep, at this fell doom."

P. 69, l. 1249, 'Thou shalt weep hereafter.]-Cf. *Othello*, v. ii., "Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kiss thee, And love thee after."

P. 69, ll. 1251 ff.—This curious prayer to the Sun to "save" Medea—both from the crime of killing her children and the misfortune of being caught by her enemies—is apparently meant to prepare us for the scene of the Dragon Chariot. Notice the emphasis laid on the divine origin of Medea's race and her transformation to "a voice of Hell."

P. 71, ll. 1278 ff., Death of the children.]-The door is evidently barred, since Jason has to use crow-bars to open it in l. 1317. Cf. the end of Maeterlinck's *Mort de Tintagiles*.

P. 71, l. 1281, A mother slew her babes in days of yore, &c.]-Ino, wife of Athamas, King of Thebes, nursed the infant Dionysus. For this Hera punished her with madness. She killed her two children, Learchus and Melicertes, and leaped into the sea. (There are various versions of the story.)—Observe the technique: just as the strain is becoming intolerable, we are turned away from tragedy to pure poetry. See on *Hip.* 731.

P. 74, l. 1320, This, that shall save me from mine enemies' rage.]-There is nothing in the words of the play to show what "this" is, but the Scholiast explains it as a chariot drawn by winged serpents, and the stage tradition seems to be clear on the subject. See note to the Aegeus scene (p. 88).

This first appearance of Medea "above, on the

tower" (Scholiast) seems to me highly effective. The result is to make Medea into something like a *dea ex machinâ*, who prophesies and pronounces judgment. See Introduction.

P. 76, l. 1370, They are dead, they are dead !]—This wrangle, though rather like some scenes in Norse sagas, is strangely discordant for a Greek play. It seems as if Euripides had deliberately departed from his usual soft and reflective style of ending in order to express the peculiar note of discord which is produced by the so-called "satisfaction" of revenge. Medea's curious cry : "Oh, thy voice ! It hurts me sore !" shows that the effect is intentional.

P. 77, l. 1379, A still green sepulchre.]—There was a yearly festival in the precinct of Hera Acaia, near Corinth, celebrating the deaths of Medea's children. This festival, together with its ritual and "sacred legend," evidently forms the germ of the whole tragedy. Cf. the Trozenian rites over the tomb of Hippolytus, *Hip.* 1424 ff.

P. 77, l. 1386, The hands of thine old Argo—Jason, left friendless and avoided by his kind, went back to live with his old ship, now rotting on the shore. While he was sleeping under it, a beam of wood fell upon him and broke his head. It is a most grave mistake to treat the line as spurious.

THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

IPHIGENÎA, *eldest daughter of Agamemnon, King of Argos ; supposed to have been sacrificed by him to Artemis at Aulis.*

ORESTES, *her brother ; pursued by Furies for killing his mother, Clytemnestra, who had murdered Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *Prince of Phocis, friend to Orestes.*

THOAS, *King of Tauris, a savage country beyond the Symplégades.*

A HERDSMAN.

A MESSENGER.

CHORUS of Captive Greek Women, handmaids to Iphigenîa.

The Goddess PALLAS ATHENA.

The play was first performed between the years 414 and 412 B.C.

PREFACE

THE *Iphigenia in Tauris* is not in the modern sense a tragedy ; it is a romantic play, beginning in a tragic atmosphere and moving through perils and escapes to a happy end. To the archaeologist the cause of this lies in the ritual on which the play is based. All Greek tragedies that we know have as their nucleus something which the Greeks called an *Aition*—a cause or origin. They all explain some ritual or observance or commemorate some great event. Nearly all, as a matter of fact, have for this *Aition* a Tomb Ritual, as, for instance, the *Hippolytus* has the worship paid by the Trozenian Maidens at that hero's grave. The use of this Tomb Ritual may well explain both the intense shadow of death that normally hangs over the Greek tragedies, and also perhaps the feeling of the Fatality, which is, rightly or wrongly, supposed to be prominent in them. For if you are actually engaged in commemorating your hero's funeral, it follows that all through the story, however bright his prospects may seem, you feel that he is bound to die ; he cannot escape. A good many tragedies, however, are built not on Tomb Rituals but on other sacred *Aitia* : on the foundation of a city, like the *Aetnae*, the ritual of the torch-race, like the *Prometheus* ; on some great legendary succouring of the oppressed, like the

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Suppliant Women of Aeschylus and Euripides. And the rite on which the *Iphigenîa* is based is essentially one in which a man is brought to the verge of death but just does not die.

The rite is explained in ll. 1450 ff. of the play. On a certain festival at Halae in Attica a human victim was led to the altar of Artemis Tauropolos, touched on the throat with a sword and then set free: very much what happened to Orestes among the Tauri, and exactly what happened to Iphigenîa at Aulis. Both legends have doubtless grown out of the same ritual.

Like all the great Greek legends, the Iphigenîa myths take many varying forms. They are all of them, in their essence, conjectural restorations, by poets or other 'wise men,' of supposed early history. According to the present play, Agamemnon, when just about to sail with all the powers of Greece against Troy, was bound by weather at Aulis. The medicine-man Calchas explained that Artemis demanded the sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigenîa, who was then at home with her mother, Clytemnestra. Odysseus and Agamemnon sent for the maiden on the pretext that she was to be married to the famous young hero, Achilles; she was brought to Aulis and treacherously slaughtered—or, at least, so people thought.

There is a subject for tragedy there; and it was brilliantly treated in Euripides' *Iphigenîa in Aulis*, which was probably left unfinished at his death. But our play chooses a later moment of the story.

In reality Artemis at the last moment saved Iphigenîa, rapt her away from mortal eyes and set her down in the land of the Tauri to be her priestess. (*In*

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Tauris is only the Latin for "among the Tauri".) These Tauri possessed an image of Artemis which had fallen from heaven, and kept up a savage rite of sacrificing to it all strangers who were cast on their shores. Iphigenîa, obedient to her goddess and held by "the spell of the altar," had to consecrate the victims as they went in to be slain. So far only barbarian strangers had come: she waited half in horror, half in a rage of revenge, for the day when she should have to sacrifice a Greek. The first Greek that came was her own brother, Orestes, who had been sent by Apollo to take the image of Artemis and bear it to Attica, where it should no more be stained with human sacrifice.

If we try to turn from these myths to the historical facts that underly them, we may conjecture that there were three goddesses of the common Aegean type, worshipped in different places. At Brauron and elsewhere there was Iphigenîa ('Birth-mighty'); at Halae there was the Tauropolos ('the Bull-rider,' like Europa, who rode on the horned Moon); among the savage and scarcely known Tauri there was some goddess to whom shipwrecked strangers were sacrificed. Lastly there came in the Olympian Artemis. Now all these goddesses (except possibly the Taurian, of whom we know little) were associated with the Moon and with childbirth, and with rites for sacrificing or redeeming the first-born. Naturally enough, therefore, they were all gradually absorbed by the prevailing worship of Artemis. Tauropolos became an epithet of Artemis, Iphigenîa became her priestess and 'Keybearer.' And the word 'Tauropolos,' which had become obscure, was explained as a

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reference to the Tauri. The old rude image of Tauropolos had come from the Tauri, and the strange ritual was descended from their bloody rites. So the Taurian goddess must be Artemis too. The tendency of ancient polytheism, when it met with some alien religion, was not to treat the alien gods as entirely new persons, but assuming the real and obvious existence of their own gods, to inquire by what names and with what ritual the strangers worshipped them.

As usual in Euripides, the central character of this play is a woman, and a woman most unsparingly yet lovingly studied. Iphigenia is no mere 'sympathetic heroine.' She is a worthy member of her great but sinister house; a haggard and exiled woman, eating out her heart in two conflicting emotions: intense longing for home and all that she had loved in childhood, and bitter self-pitying rage against 'her murderers.' The altar of Aulis is constantly in her thoughts. She does not know whether to hate her father, but at least she can with a clear conscience hate all the rest of those implicated, Calchas, Odysseus, Menelaus, and most fiercely, though somewhat unjustly, Helen. All the good women in Euripides go wild at the name of Helen. Iphigenia broods on her wrongs till she can see nothing else; she feels as if she hated all Greeks, and lived only for revenge, for the hope of some day slaughtering Greeks at her altar, as pitilessly as they slaughtered her at Aulis. She knows how horrible this state of mind is, but she is now "turned to stone, and has no pity left in her." Then the Greeks come; and even before she knows who they really are, the hard shell of her bitterness

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slowly yields. Her heart goes out to them ; she draws Orestes against his will into talk ; she insists on pitying him, insists on his pitying her ; and eventually determines, come what may, that she will save at least the one stranger that she has talked with most. Presently comes the discovery who the strangers are ; and she is at once ready to die with them or for them.

As for the scene in which Iphigénia befools Thoas, my moral feelings may be obtuse, but I certainly cannot feel the slightest compunction or shock at the heavy lying. Which of us would not expect at least as much from his own sister, if it lay with her to save him from the altars of Benin or Ashanti ? I suspect that the good people who lament over “the low standard of truthfulness shown by even the most enlightened pagans” have either forgotten the days when they read stories of adventure, or else have not, in reading this scene, realised properly the strain of hairbreadth peril that lies behind the comedy of it. A single slip in Iphigénia’s tissue of desperate improvisations would mean death, and not to herself alone. One feels rather sorry for Thoas, certainly, and he is a very fine fellow in his way ; but a person who insists on slaughtering strangers cannot expect those strangers or their friends to treat him with any approach to candour.

The two young men come nearer to mere ideal *héros de roman* than any other characters in Euripides. They are surpassingly handsome and brave and unselfish and everything that they should be ; and they stand out like heroes against the mob of cowardly

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little Taurians in the Herdsman's speech. Yet they have none of the unreality that is usual in such figures. The shadow of madness and guilt hanging over Orestes makes a difference. At his first entrance, when danger is still far off, he is a mass of broken nerves; he depends absolutely on Pylades. In the later scenes, when they are face to face with death, the underlying strength of the son of the Great King asserts itself and makes one understand why, for all his madness, Orestes is the chief, and Pylades only the devoted follower.

Romantic plays with happy endings are almost of necessity inferior in artistic value to true tragedies. Not, one would hope, simply because they end happily; happiness in itself is certainly not less beautiful than grief; but because a tragedy in its great moments can generally afford to be sincere, while romantic plays live in an atmosphere of ingenuity and make-believe. The *Iphigenia* is not of the same order as *The Trojan Women*. Yet it is a delightful play; subtle, ever-changing, full of movement and poignancy. The recognition scene became to Aristotle a model of what such a scene should be; and the long passage before it, from the entrance of the two princes onward, seems to me one of the most skilful and fascinating in Greek drama.

And after all the adventure of Euripides is not quite like that of the average romantic writer. It is shot through by reflection, by reality and by sadness. There is a shadow that broods over the *Iphigenia*, though it is not the shadow of death. It is exile, homesickness. *Iphigenia*, *Orestes*, the *Women of*

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the Chorus, are all exiles, all away from their heart's home, among savage people and cruel gods. They wait on the shore while the sea-birds take wing for Hellas, out beyond the barrier of the Dark-Blue Rocks and the great stretches of magical and 'unfriended' sea. Nearly all the lyrics are full of sea-light and the clash of waters, and the lyrics are usually the very soul of Euripidean tragedy.

G. M.

THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

The Scene shows a great and barbaric Temple on a desolate sea-coast. An altar is visible stained with blood. There are spoils of slain men hanging from the roof. IPHIGENIA, in the dress of a Priestess, comes out from the Temple.

IPHIGENIA.

Child of the man of torment and of pride
Tantalid Pelops bore a royal bride
On flying steeds from Pisa. Thence did spring
Atreus : from Atreus, linkèd king with king,
Menelaüs, Agamemnon. His am I
And Clytemnestra's child : whom cruelly
At Aulis, where the strait of shifting blue
Frets with quick winds, for Helen's sake he slew,
Or thinks to have slain ; such sacrifice he swore
To Artemis on that deep-bosomed shore.

For there Lord Agamemnon, hot with joy
To win for Greece the crown of conquered Troy,
For Menelaüs' sake through all distress
Pursuing Helen's vanished loveliness,
Gathered his thousand ships from every coast
Of Hellas : when there fell on that great host
Storms and despair of sailing. Then the King
Sought signs of fire, and Calchas answering

Spake thus : "O Lord of Hellas, from this shore
No ship of thine may move for evermore,
Till Artemis receive in gift of blood
Thy child, Iphigenia. Long hath stood
Thy vow, to pay to Her that bringeth light
Whatever birth most fair by day or night
The year should bring. That year thy queen did
bear

A child—whom here I name of all most fair.
See that she die."

So from my mother's side
By lies Odysseus won me, to be bride
In Aulis to Achilles. When I came,
They took me and above the altar flame
Held, and the sword was swinging to the gash,
When, lo, out of their vision in a flash
Artemis rapt me, leaving in my place
A deer to bleed ; and on through a great space
Of shining sky upbore and in this town
Of Tauris the Unfriended set me down ;
Where o'er a savage people savagely
King Thoas rules. ^A This is her sanctuary
And I her priestess. Therefore, by the rite
Of worship here, wherein she hath delight—
Though fair in naught but name. . . . But Artemis
Is near ; I speak no further. Mine it is
To consecrate and touch the victim's hair ;
Doings of blood unspoken are the care
Of others, where her inmost chambers lie.
Ah me !

But what dark dreams, thou clear and morning sky,
I have to tell thee, can that bring them ease !
Meseemed in sleep, far over distant seas,

I lay in Argos, and about me slept
My maids : and, lo, the level earth was swept
With quaking like the sea. Out, out I fled,
And, turning, saw the cornice overhead
Reel, and the beams and mighty door-trees down
In blocks of ruin round me overthrown.
One single oaken pillar, so I dreamed,
Stood of my father's house ; and hair, meseemed,
Waved from its head all brown : and suddenly
A human voice it had, and spoke. And I,
Fulfilling this mine office, built on blood
Of unknown men, before that pillar stood,
And washed him clean for death, mine eyes
 astream
With weeping.

 And this way I read my dream.
Orestes is no more : on him did fall
My cleansing drops.—The pillar of the hall
Must be the man first-born ; and they on whom
My cleansing falls, their way is to the tomb.

Therefore to my dead brother will I pour
Such sacrifice, I on this bitter shore
And he beyond great seas, as still I may,
With all those maids whom Thoas bore away
In war from Greece and gave me for mine own.
But wherefore come they not ? I must be gone
And wait them in the temple, where I dwell.

[She goes into the Temple.]

VOICE.

Did some one cross the pathway ? Guard thee
well.

ANOTHER VOICE.

I am watching. Every side I turn mine eye.

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES. Their dress shows they are travellers : ORESTES is shaken and distraught.

ORESTES.

How, brother ? And is this the sanctuary
At last, for which we sailed from Argolis ?

PYLADES.

For sure, Orestes. Seest thou not it is ?

ORESTES.

The altar, too, where Hellene blood is shed.

PYLADES.

How like long hair those blood-stains, tawny red !

ORESTES.

And spoils of slaughtered men—there by the thatch.

PYLADES.

Aye, first-fruits of the harvest, when they catch
Their strangers !—’Tis a place to search with care.
[*He searches, while ORESTES sits.*]

ORESTES.

O God, where hast thou brought me ? What new
snare

Is this?—I slew my mother ; I avenged
 My father at thy bidding ; I have ranged
 A homeless world, hunted by shapes of pain,
 And circling trod in mine own steps again.
 At last I stood once more before thy throne
 And cried thee question, what thing should be done
 To end these miseries, wherein I reel
 Through Hellas, mad, lashed like a burning wheel ;
 And thou didst bid me seek . . . what land but this
 Of Tauri, where thy sister Artemis
 Her altar hath, and seize on that divine
 Image which fell, men say, into this shrine
 From heaven. This I must seize by chance or plot
 Or peril—clearer word was uttered not—
 And bear to Attic earth. If this be done,
 I should have peace from all my malison.

Lo, I have done thy will. I have pierced the seas
 Where no Greek man may live.—Ho, Pylades,
 Sole sharer of my quest : hast seen it all ?
 What can we next ? Thou seest this circuit wall
 Enormous ? Must we climb the public stair,
 With all men watching ? Shall we seek somewhere
 Some lock to pick, some secret bolt or bar—
 Of all which we know nothing ? Where we are,
 If one man mark us, if they see us prize
 The gate, or think of entrance anywise,
 'Tis death.—We still have time to fly for home :
 Back to the galley quick, ere worse things come !

PYLADES.

To fly we dare not, brother. 'Twere a thing
 Not of our custom ; and ill work, to bring

God's word to such reviling.—Let us leave
 The temple now, and gather in some cave
 Where glooms the cool sea ripple. But not where
 The ship lies ; men might chance to see her there
 And tell some chief ; then certain were our doom.
 But when the fringed eye of Night be come
 Then we must dare, by all ways foul or fine,
 To thief that wondrous Image from its shrine.
 Ah, see ; far up, between each pair of beams
 A hollow one might creep through ! Danger
 gleams
 Like sunshine to a brave man's eyes, and fear
 Of what may be is no help anywhere.

ORESTES.

Aye ; we have never braved these leagues of way
 To falter at the end. See, I obey
 Thy words. They are ever wise. Let us go
 mark
 Some cavern, to lie hid till fall of dark.
 God will not suffer that bad things be stirred
 To mar us now, and bring to naught the word
 Himself hath spoke. Aye, and no peril brings
 Pardon for turning back to sons of kings.

*[They go out towards the shore. After they
 are gone, enter gradually the WOMEN
 OF THE CHORUS.]*

CHORUS.

Peace ! Peace upon all who dwell
 By the Sister Rocks that clash in the swell
 Of the Friendless Seas.

O Child of Leto, thou,
Dictynna mountain-born,
To the cornice gold-inlaid
To the pillared sanctities,
We come in the cold of morn,
We come with virgin brow,
Pure as our oath was sworn,
Handmaids of thine handmaid
Who holdeth the stainless keys.

From Hellas, that once was ours,
We come before thy gate,
From the land of the western seas,
The horses and the towers,
The wells and the garden trees,
And the seats where our fathers sate.

LEADER.

What tidings, ho ? With what intent
Hast called me to thy shrine and thee,
O child of him who crossed the sea
To Troy with that great armament,
The thousand prows, the myriad swords ?
I come, O child of Atreid Lords.

[IPHIGENIA, *followed by ATTENDANTS,*
comes from the Temple.

IPHIGENIA.

Alas, O maidens mine,
I am filled full of tears :
My heart filled with the beat
Of tears, as of dancing feet,

A lyreless joyless line,
And music meet for the dead.

For a whisper is in mine ears,
By visions borne on the breath
Of the Night that now is fled,
Of a brother gone to death.
Oh sorrow and weeping sore,
For the house that no more is,
For the dead that were kings of yore
And the labour of Argolis !

[She begins the Funeral Rite.]

O Spirit, thou unknown,
Who bearest on dark wings
My brother, my one, mine own,
I bear drink-offerings,
And the cup that bringeth ease
Flowing through Earth's deep breast ;
Milk of the mountain kine,
The hallowed gleam of wine,
The toil of murmuring bees :
By these shall the dead have rest.

To an ATTENDANT.

The golden goblet let me pour,
And that which Hades thirsteth for.

O branch of Agamemnon's tree
Beneath the earth, as to one dead,
This cup of love I pour to thee.
Oh, pardon, that I may not shed

One lock of hair to wreathe thy tomb,
 One tear : so far, so far am I
 From what to me and thee was home,
 And where in all men's fantasy,
 Butchered, O God ! I also lie.

CHORUS.

Woe ; woe : I too with refluent melody,
 An echo wild of the dirges of the Asian,
 I, thy bond maiden, cry to answer thee :
 The music that lieth hid in lamentation,
 The song that is heard in the deep hearts of the dead,
 That the Lord of dead men 'mid his dancing
 singeth,
 And never joy-cry, never joy it bringeth ;
 Woe for the house of Kings in desolation,
 Woe for the light of the sceptre vanishèd.

From kings in Argos of old, from joyous kings,
 The beginning came :
 Then peril swift upon peril, flame on flame :
 The dark and wheeling coursers, as wild with wings,
 The cry of one betrayed on a drowning shore,
 The sun that blanched in heaven, the world that
 changed—
 Evil on evil and none alone !—deranged
 By the Golden Lamb and the wrong grown ever more ;
 Blood following blood, sorrow on sorrow sore !
 So come the dead of old, the dead in wrath,
 Back on the seed of the high Tantalidae ;
 Surely the Spirit of Life an evil path
 Hath hewed for thee.

IPHIGENIA.

From the beginning the Spirit of my life
Was an evil spirit. Alas for my mother's zone,
And the night that bare me ! From the beginning
Strife,
As a book to read, Fate gave me for mine own.
They wooed a bride for the strikers down of Troy—
Thy first-born, Mother : was it for this, thy prayer ?—
A hind of slaughter to die in a father's snare,
Gift of a sacrifice where none hath joy.

They set me on a royal wain ;
Down the long sand they led me on,
A bride new-decked, a bride of bane,
In Aulis to the Nereid's son.
And now estranged for evermore
Beyond the far estranging foam
I watch a flat and herbless shore,
Unloved, unchilded, without home
Or city : never more to meet
For Hera's dance with Argive maids,
Nor round the loom 'mid singing sweet
Make broideries and storied braids,
Of writhing giants overthrown
And clear-eyed Pallas. . . . All is gone !
Red hands and ever-ringing ears :
The blood of men that friendless die,
The horror of the strangers' cry
Unheard, the horror of their tears.

But now, let even that have rest :
I weep for him in Argos slain,

The brother whom I knew, Ah me,
A babe, a flower ; and yet to be—
There on his mother's arms and breast—
The crowned Orestes, lord of men !

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

Stay, yonder from some headland of the sea
There comes—methinks a herdsman, seeking thee.

Enter a HERDSMAN. IPHIGENIA is still on her knees.

HERDSMAN.

Daughter of Clytemnestra and her king,
Give ear ! I bear news of a wondrous thing.

IPHIGENIA.

What news, that should so mar my obsequies ?

HERDSMAN.

A ship hath passed the blue Symplêgades,
And here upon our coast two men are thrown,
Young, bold, good slaughter for the altar-stone
Of Artemis ! *[She rises.]*

Make all the speed ye may ;
'Tis not too much. The blood-bowl and the spray !

IPHIGENIA.

Men of what nation ? Doth their habit show ?

HERDSMAN.

Hellenes for sure, but that is all we know.

IPHIGENIA.

No name ? No other clue thine ear could seize ?

HERDSMAN.

We heard one call his comrade "Pylades."

IPHIGENIA.

Yes. And the man who spoke—his name was what ?

HERDSMAN.

None of us heard. I think they spoke it not.

IPHIGENIA.

How did ye see them first, how make them fast ?

HERDSMAN.

Down by the sea, just where the surge is cast. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

The sea ? What is the sea to thee and thine ?

HERDSMAN.

We came to wash our cattle in the brine.

IPHIGENIA.

Go back, and tell how they were taken ; show
The fashion of it, for I fain would know
All.—'Tis so long a time, and never yet,
Never, hath Greek blood made this altar wet.

HERDSMAN.

We had brought our forest cattle where the seas
Break in long tides from the Symplêgades.

A bay is there, deep eaten by the surge
And hollowed clear, with cover by the verge
Where purple-fishers camp. These twain were there
When one of mine own men, a forager,
Spied them, and tiptoed whispering back : "God save
Us now ! Two things unearthly by the wave
Sitting !" We looked, and one of pious mood
Raised up his hands to heaven and praying stood :
"Son of the white Sea Spirit, high in rule,
Storm-lord Palaemon, Oh, be merciful :
Or sit ye there the warrior twins of Zeus,
Or something loved of Him, from whose great thews
Was born the Nereids' fifty-fluted choir."

Another, flushed with folly and the fire
Of lawless daring, laughed aloud and swore
'Twas shipwrecked sailors skulking on the shore,
Our rule and custom here being known, to slay
All strangers. And most thought this was the way
To follow, and seek out for Artemis
The blood-gift of our people.

Just at this
One of the strangers started from his seat,
And stood, and upward, downward, with a beat
His head went, and he groaned, and all his arm
Trembled. Then, as a hunter gives alarm,
He shrieked, stark mad and raving : "Pylades,
Dost see her there ?—And there—Oh, no one sees !—
A she-dragon of Hell, and all her head
Agape with fangèd asps, to bite me dead.
She hath no face, but somewhere from her cloak
Bloweth a wind of fire and bloody smoke :
The wings' beat fans it : in her arms, Ah see !
My mother, dead grey stone, to cast on me

And crush. . . . Help, help ! They crowd on me
behind. . . .”

No shapes at all were there. 'Twas his sick mind
Which turned the herds that lowed and barking
hounds

That followed, to some visionary sounds
Of Furies. For ourselves, we did but sit
And watch in silence, wondering if the fit
Would leave him dead. When suddenly out shone
His sword, and like a lion he leaped upon
Our herds, to fight his Furies ! Flank and side
He stabbed and smote them, till the foam was dyed
Red at the waves' edge. Marry, when we saw
The cattle hurt and falling, no more law
We gave, but sprang to arms and blew the horn
For help—so strong they looked and nobly born
For thralls like us to meet, that pair unknown.

Well, a throng gathered ere much time was gone ;
When suddenly the whirl of madness slips
From off him and he falls, quite weak, his lips
Dropping with foam. When once we saw him
fall

So timely, we were at him one and all
To pelt and smite. The other watched us come,
But knelt and wiped those lips all dank with foam
And tended the sick body, while he held
His cloak's good web above him for a shield ;
So cool he was to ward off every stone
And all the while care for that stricken one.

Then rose the fallen man, calm now and grave,
Looked, and saw battle bursting like a wave
That bursts, and knew that peril close at hand
Which now is come, and groaned. On every hand

We stood, and stoned and stoned, and ceased not. Aye,
'Twas then we heard that fearful battle-cry :
"Ho, Pylades, 'tis death ! But let it be
A gallant death ! Draw sword and follow me."

When those two swords came flashing, up the glen
Through the loose rocks we scattered back ; but when
One band was flying, down by rocks and trees
Came others pelting : did they turn on these,
Back stole the first upon them, stone on stone.
'Twas past belief : of all those shots not one
Struck home. The goddess kept her fated prey
Perfect. Howbeit, at last we made our way
Right, left and round behind them on the sands,
And rushed, and beat the swords out of their hands,
So tired they scarce could stand. Then to the king
We bore them both, and he, not tarrying,
Sends them to thee, to touch with holy spray—
And then the blood-bowl !

I have heard thee pray,
Priestess, ere now for such a draft as this.
Aye, slay but these two chiefs to Artemis
And Hellas shall have paid thy debt, and know
What blood was spilt in Aulis long ago.

LEADER.

I marvel that one mad, whoe'er he be,
Should sail from Hellas to the Friendless Sea.

IPHIGENIA.

'Tis well. Let thy hand bring them, and mine own
Shall falter not till here God's will be done.

[*Exit* HERDSMAN.]

O suffering heart, not fierce thou wast of old
To shipwrecked men. Nay, pities manifold
Held thee in fancy homeward, lest thy hand
At last should fall on one of thine own land.
But now, for visions that have turned to stone
My heart, to know Orestes sees the sun
No more, a cruel woman waits you here,
Whoe'er ye be, and one without a tear.

'Tis true : I know by mine own evil will :
One long in pain, if things more suffering still
Fall to his hand, will hate them for his own
Torment. . . . And no great wind hath ever blown,
No ship from God hath passed the Clashing Gate,
To bring me Helen, who hath earned my hate,
And Menelaus, till I mocked their prayers
In this new Aulis, that is mine, not theirs :
Where Greek hands held me lifted, like a beast
For slaughter, and my throat bled. And the priest
My father ! . . . Not one pang have I forgot.

Ah me, the blind half-prisoned arms I shot
This way and that, to find his beard, his knees,
Groping and wondering : "Father, what are these
For bridal rites ? My mother even now
Mid Argive women sings for me, whom thou . . .
What dost thou ? She sings happy songs, and all
Is dance and sound of piping in the hall ;
And here. . . . Is he a vampyre, is he one
That fattens on the dead, thy Peleus' son—
Whose passion shaken like a torch before
My leaping chariot, lured me to this shore
To wed—"

Ah me ! And I had hid my face,
Burning, behind my veil. I would not press

Orestes to my arms . . . who now is slain ! . . .
 I would not kiss my sister's lips again,
 For shame and fulness of the heart to meet
 My bridegroom. All my kisses, all my sweet
 Words were stored up and hid : I should come
 back
 So soon to Argos !

 And thou, too : alack,
 Brother, if dead thou art, from what high things
 Thy youth is outcast, and the pride of kings
 Fallen !

 And this the goddess deemeth good !
 If ever mortal hand be dark with blood ;
 Nay, touch a new-made mother or one slain
 In war, her ban is on him. 'Tis a stain
 She driveth from her outer walls ; and then
 Herself doth drink this blood of slaughtered men ?
 Could ever Leto, she of the great King
 Beloved, be mother to so gross a thing ?
 These tales be lies, false as those feastings wild
 Of Tantalus and Gods that tore a child.
 This land of murderers to its god hath given
 Its own lust ; evil dwelleth not in heaven.

[She goes into the Temple.]

CHORUS.

Dark of the sea, dark of the sea,	<i>[Strophe 1.]</i>
Gates of the warring water,	
One, in the old time, conquered you,	
A wingèd passion that burst the blue,	
When the West was shut and the Dawn lay free	
To the pain of Inachus' daughter.	

But who be these, from where the rushes blow
On pale Eurôtas, from pure Dirce's flow,
That turn not neither falter,
Seeking Her land, where no man breaketh bread,
Her without pity, round whose virgin head
Blood on the pillars rusts from long ago,
Blood on the ancient altar.

[*Antistrophe* 1.]

A flash of the foam, a flash of the foam,
A wave on the oarblade welling,
And out they passed to the heart of the blue :
A chariot shell that the wild winds drew.
Is it for passion of gold they come,
Or pride to make great their dwelling ?

For sweet is Hope, yea, to much mortal woe
So sweet that none may turn from it nor go,
Whom once the far voice calleth,
To wander through fierce peoples and the gleam
Of desolate seas, in every heart a dream :
And these she maketh empty die, and, lo,
To that man's hand she falleth.

[*Strophe* 2.]

Through the Clashing Rocks they burst :
They passed by the Cape unsleeping
Of Phineus' sons accurst :
They ran by the star-lit bay
Upon magic surges sweeping,
Where folk on the waves astray
Have seen, through the gleaming grey,
Ring behind ring, men say,
The dance of the old Sea's daughters.

h me !

What mother then was yours, O strangers, say,
 and father ? And your sister, if you have
 sister : both at once, so young and brave
 to leave her brotherless ! Who knows when heaven
 may send that fortune ? For to none is given
 to know the coming nor the end of woe ;
 so dark is God, and to great darkness go
 his paths, by blind chance mazèd from our ken.
 Whence are ye come, O most unhappy men ?
 from some far home, methinks, ye have found this
 shore

And far shall stay from home for evermore.

ORESTES.

Why weepst thou, woman, to make worse the smart
 Of that which needs must be, whoe'er thou art ?
 count it not for gentleness, when one
 Who means to slay, seeks first to make undone
 By pity that sharp dread. Nor praise I him,
 With hope long dead, who sheddeth tears to dim
 The pain that grips him close. The evil so
 is doubled into twain. He doth but show
 His feeble heart, and, as he must have died,
 Dies.—Let ill fortune float upon her tide
 And weep no more for us. What way this land
 Worships its god we know and understand.

IPHIGENIA.

Say first . . . which is it men call Pylades ?

ORESTES.

'Tis this man's name, if that will give thee ease.

IPHIGENIA.

From what walled town of Hellas cometh he ?

ORESTES.

Enough !—How would the knowledge profit thee

IPHIGENIA.

Are ye two brethren of one mother born ?

ORESTES.

No, not in blood. In love we are brothers sworn.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou also hast a name : tell me thereof.

ORESTES.

Call me Unfortunate. 'Tis name enough.

IPHIGENIA.

I asked not that. Let that with Fortune lie.

ORESTES.

Fools cannot laugh at them that nameless die.

IPHIGENIA.

Why grudge me this ? Hast thou such mighty fame ?

ORESTES.

My body, if thou wilt, but not my name.

A
V IPHIGENIA.

A
A or yet the land of Greece where thou wast bred?

T
M ORESTES.

T hat gain to have told it thee, when I am dead?

S
H IPHIGENIA.

F ay : why shouldst thou deny so small a grace?

A
ORESTES.

K now then, great Argos was my native place.

IPHIGENIA.

St ranger ! The truth ! . . . From Argos art thou
come ?

ORESTES.

M ycenae, once a rich land, was my home.

IPHIGENIA.

'T is banishment that brings thee here—or what ?

ORESTES.

A kind of banishment, half forced, half sought.

IPHIGENIA.

Wouldst thou but tell me all I need of thee !

ORESTES.

'Twere not much added to my misery.

IPHIGENIA.

From Argos ! . . . Oh, how sweet to see thee here !

ORESTES.

Enjoy it, then. To me 'tis sorry cheer.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou knowst the name of Troy ? Far doth it flit.

ORESTES.

Would God I had not ; nay, nor dreamed of it.

IPHIGENIA.

Men fable it is fallen beneath the sword ?

ORESTES.

Fallen it is. Thou hast heard no idle word.

IPHIGENIA.

Fallen ! At last !—And Helen taken too ?

ORESTES.

Aye ; on an evil day for one I knew.

IPHIGENIA.

Where is she? I too have some anger stored. . . .

ORESTES.

In Sparta! Once more happy with her lord!

IPHIGENIA.

Oh, hated of all Greece, not only me!

ORESTES.

I too have tasted of her wizardry.

IPHIGENIA.

And came the armies home, as the tales run?

ORESTES.

To answer that were many tales in one.

IPHIGENIA.

Oh, give me this hour full! Thou wilt soon die.

ORESTES.

Ask, if such longing holds thee. I will try.

IPHIGENIA.

A seer called Calchas! Did he ever come . . .?

ORESTES.

Calchas is dead, as the news went at home.

IPHIGENIA.

Good news, ye gods!—Odysseus, what of him?

ORESTES.

Not home yet, but still living, as men deem.

IPHIGENIA.

Curse him! And may he see his home no more.

ORESTES.

Why curse him? All his house is stricken sore.

IPHIGENIA.

How hath the Nereid's son, Achilles, sped?

ORESTES.

Small help his bridal brought him! He is dead.

IPHIGENIA.

A false fierce bridal, so the sufferers tell!

ORESTES.

Who art thou, questioning of Greece so well?

IPHIGENIA.

I was Greek. Evil caught me long ago.

ORESTES.

Small wonder, then, thou hast such wish to know.

IPHIGENIA.

That war-lord, whom they call so high in bliss. . . .

ORESTES.

None such is known to me. What name was his?

IPHIGENIA.

They called him Agamemnon, Atreus' son.

ORESTES.

I know not. Cease.—My questioning is done.

IPHIGENIA.

'Twill be such joy to me! How fares he? Tell!

ORESTES.

Dead. And hath wrecked another's life as well.

IPHIGENIA.

Dead? By what dreadful fortune? Woe is me!

ORESTES.

Why sighst thou? Had he any link with thee?

IPHIGENIA.

I did but think of his old joy and pride.

ORESTES.

His own wife foully stabbed him, and he died.

IPHIGENIA.

O God !

I pity her that slew . . . and him that slew.

ORESTES.

Now cease thy questions. Add no word thereto.

IPHIGENIA.

But one word. Lives she still, that hapless wife ?

ORESTES.

No. Her own son, her first-born, took her life.

IPHIGENIA.

O shipwrecked house ! What thought was in his
brain ?

ORESTES.

Justice on her, to avenge his father slain.

IPHIGENIA.

Alas !

A bad false duty bravely hath he wrought.

ORESTES.

Yet God, for all his duty, helps him not.

IPHIGENIA.

And not one branch of Atreus' tree lives on ?

ORESTES.

Electra lives, unmated and alone.

IPHIGENIA.

The child they slaughtered . . . is there word of her ?

ORESTES.

Why, no, save that she died in Aulis there.

IPHIGENIA.

Poor child ! Poor father, too, who killed and lied !

ORESTES.

For a bad woman's worthless sake she died.

IPHIGENIA.

The dead king's son, lives he in Argos still ?

ORESTES.

He lives, now here, now nowhere, bent with ill.

IPHIGENIA.

O dreams, light dreams, farewell ! Ye too were lies.

ORESTES.

Aye ; the gods too, whom mortals deem so wise,
Are nothing clearer than some wingèd dream ;
And all their ways, like man's ways, but a stream
Of turmoil. He who cares to suffer least,
Not blind, as fools are blinded, by a priest,
Goes straight . . . to what death, those who know
him know.

LEADER.

We too have kinsmen dear, but, being low,
None heedeth, live they still or live they not.

IPHIGENIA (*with sudden impulse*).

Listen ! For I am fallen upon a thought,
Strangers, of some good use to you and me,
Both. And 'tis thus most good things come to be,
When different eyes hold the same way for fair.

Stranger, if I can save thee, wilt thou bear
To Argos and the friends who loved my youth
Some word ? There is a tablet which, in ruth
For me and mine ill works, a prisoner wrote,
Ta'en by the king in war. He knew 'twas not
My will that craved for blood, but One on high
Who holds it righteous her due prey shall die.
And since that day no Greek hath ever come
Whom I could save and send to Argos home
With prayer for help to any friend : but thou,
I think, dost loathe me not ; and thou dost know
Mycenae and the names that fill my heart.
Help me ! Be saved ! Thou also hast thy part,

Thy life for one light letter. . . . (ORESTES *looks at*
PYLADES.) For thy friend,
The Law compelleth. He must bear the end
By Artemis ordained, apart from thee.

ORESTES.

Strange woman, as thou biddest let it be,
Save one thing. 'Twere for me a heavy weight
Should this man die. 'Tis I and mine own fate
That steer our goings. He but sails with me
Because I suffer much. It must not be
That by his ruin I should 'scape mine own,
And win thy grace withal. 'Tis simply done.
Give him the tablet. He with faithful will
Shall all thy hest in Argolis fulfil.
And I . . . who cares may kill me. Vile is he
Who leaves a friend in peril and goes free
Himself. And, as it chances, this is one
Right dear to me ; his life is as my own.

IPHIGENIA.

O royal heart ! Surely from some great seed
This branch is born, that can so love indeed.
God grant the one yet living of my race
Be such as thou ! For not quite brotherless
Am even I, save that I see him not,
Strangers. . . . Howbeit, thy pleasure shall be wrought.
This man shall bear the message, and thou go
To death. So greatly thou wilt have it so !

ORESTES.

Where is the priest who does this cruelty ?

IPHIGENIA.

'Tis I. This altar's spell is over me.

ORESTES.

A grievous office and unblest, O maid.

IPHIGENIA.

What dare I do? The law must be obeyed.

ORESTES.

A girl to hold a sword and stab men dead!

IPHIGENIA.

I shall but sign the water on thy head.

ORESTES.

And who shall strike me, if I needs must ask?

IPHIGENIA.

There be within these vaults who know their task.

ORESTES.

My grave, when they have finished their desire?

IPHIGENIA.

A great gulf of the rock, and holy fire.

ORESTES.

Woe's me!

Would that my sister's hand could close mine eyes!

IPHIGENIA.

Alas, she dwelleth under distant skies,
 Unhappy one, and vain is all thy prayer.
 Yet, Oh, thou art from Argos : all of care
 That can be, I will give and fail thee not.
 Rich raiment to thy burial shall be brought,
 And oil to cool thy pyre in golden floods,
 And sweet that from a thousand mountain buds
 The murmuring bee hath garnered, I will throw
 To die with thee in fragrance. . . .

I must go

And seek the tablet from the Goddess' room
 Within.—Oh, do not hate me for my doom !

Watch them, ye servitors, but leave them free.

It may be, past all hoping, it may be,
 My word shall sail to Argos, to his hand
 Whom most I love. How joyous will he stand
 To know, past hope, that here on the world's
 rim

His dead are living, and cry out for him !

[She goes into the Temple.]

CHORUS.

Alas, we pity thee ; surely we pity thee : *[Strophe.]*
 Who art given over to the holy water,
 The drops that fall deadly as drops of blood.

ORESTES.

I weep not, ye Greek maidens : but farewell.

CHORUS.

[*Antistrophe.*

Aye, and rejoice with thee ; surely rejoice with thee,
 Thou happy rover from the place of slaughter ;
 Thy foot shall stand again where thy father's
 stood.

PYLADES.

While he I love must die ? 'Tis miserable.

Divers Women of the CHORUS.

- A.* Alas, the deathward faring of the lost !
B. Woe, woe ; thou too shalt move to misery.
C. Which one shall suffer most ?
D. My heart is torn by two words evenly,
 For thee should I most sorrow, or for thee ?

ORESTES.

By heaven, is t h y thought, Pylades, like mine ?

PYLADES.

O friend, I cannot speak.—But what is thine ?

ORESTES.

Who can the damsel be ? How Greek her tone
 Of question, all of Ilion overthrown,
 And how the kings came back, the wizard flame
 Of Calchas, and Achilles' mighty name,

And ill-starred Agamemnon. With a keen
Pity she spoke, and asked me of his queen
And children. . . . The strange woman comes from
there

By race, an Argive maid.—What aileth her
With tablets, else, and questionings as though
Her own heart beat with Argos' joy or woe?

PYLADES.

Thy speech is quicker, friend, else I had said
The same; though surely all men visited
By ships have heard the fall of the great kings.
But let that be: I think of other things. . . .

ORESTES.

What? If thou hast need of me, let it be said.

PYLADES.

I cannot live for shame if thou art dead.
I sailed together with thee; let us die
Together. What a coward slave were I,
Creeping through Argos and from glen to glen
Of wind-torn Phocian hills! And most of men—
For most are bad—will whisper how one day
I left my friend to die and made my way
Home. They will say I watched the sinking breath
Of thy great house and plotted for thy death
To wed thy sister, climb into thy throne. . . .
I dread, I loathe it.—Nay, all ways but one
Are shut. My last breath shall go forth with thine,
Thy bloody sword, thy gulf of fire be mine
Also. I love thee and I dread men's scorn.

ORESTES.

Peace from such thoughts ! My burden can be borne ;

But where one pain sufficeth, double pain
I will not bear. Nay, all that scorn and stain
That fright thee, on mine own head worse would be
If I brought death on him who toiled for me.

It is no bitter thing for such an one
As God will have me be, at last to have done
With living. Thou art happy ; thy house lies
At peace with God, unstained in men's eyes ;
Mine is all evil fate and evil life. . . .

Nay, thou once safe, my sister for thy wife—
So we agreed :—in sons of hers and thine
My name will live, nor Agamemnon's line
Be blurred for ever like an evil scroll.

Back ! Rule thy land ! Let life be in thy soul !
And when thou art come to Hellas, and the plain
Of Argos where the horsemen ride, again—
Give me thy hand !—I charge thee, let there be
Some death-mound and a graven stone for me.
My sister will go weep thereat, and shear
A tress or two. Say how I ended here,
Slain by a maid of Argolis, beside
God's altar, in mine own blood purified.

And fare thee well. I have no friend like thee

For truth and love, O boy that played with me,
And hunted on Greek hills, O thou on whom
Hath lain the hardest burden of my doom !
Farewell. The Prophet and the Lord of Lies
Hath done his worst. Far out from Grecian skies

With craft forethought he driveth me, to die
Where none may mark how ends his prophecy !
I trusted in his word. I gave him all
My heart. I slew my mother at his call ;
For which things now he casts me here to die.

PYLADES.

Thy tomb shall fail thee not. Thy sister I
Will guard for ever. I, O stricken sore,
Who loved thee living and shall love thee more
Dead. But for all thou standest on the brink,
God's promise hath not yet destroyed thee. Think !
How oft, how oft the darkest hour of ill
Breaks brightest into dawn, if Fate but will !

ORESTES.

Enough. Nor god nor man can any more
Aid me. The woman standeth at the door.

Enter IPHIGENIA from the Temple.

IPHIGENIA.

Go ye within ; and have all things of need
In order set for them that do the deed.
There wait my word. [ATTENDANTS *go in.*
Ye strangers, here I hold
The many-lettered tablet, fold on fold.
Yet . . . one thing still. No man, once unafraid
And safe, remembereth all the vows he made

In fear of death. My heart misgiveth me,
Lest he who bears my tablet, once gone free,
Forget me here and set my charge at naught.

ORESTES.

What wouldst thou, then ? Thou hast some troubling
thought.

IPHIGENIA.

His sworn oath let him give, to bear this same
Tablet to Argos, to the friend I name.

ORESTES.

And if he give this oath, wilt thou swear too ?

IPHIGENIA.

What should I swear to do or not to do ?

ORESTES.

Send him from Tauris safe and free from ill.

IPHIGENIA.

I promise. How else could he do my will ?

ORESTES.

The King will suffer this ?

IPHIGENIA.

Yes : I can bend
The King, and set upon his ship thy friend.

ORESTES.

Choose then what oath is best, and he will swear.

IPHIGENIA (*to PYLADES, who has come up to her*).

Say : "To thy friend this tablet I will bear."

PYLADES (*taking the tablet*).

Good. I will bear this tablet to thy friend.

IPHIGENIA.

And I save thee beyond this kingdom's end.

PYLADES.

What god dost thou invoke to witness this ?

IPHIGENIA.

Her in whose house I labour, Artemis.

PYLADES.

And I the Lord of Heaven, eternal Zeus.

IPHIGENIA.

And if thou fail me, or thine oath abuse . . . ?

PYLADES.

May I see home no more. And thou, what then ?

IPHIGENIA.

May this foot never tread Greek earth again.

PYLADES.

But stay : there is one chance we have forgot.

IPHIGENIA.

A new oath can be sworn, if this serve not.

PYLADES.

In one case set me free. Say I be crossed
With shipwreck, and, with ship and tablet lost
And all I bear, my life be saved alone :
Let not this oath be held a thing undone,
To curse me.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, then, many ways are best
To many ends. The words thou carriest
Enrolled and hid beneath that tablet's rim,
I will repeat to thee, and thou to him
I look for. Safer so. If the scrip sail
Unhurt to Greece, itself will tell my tale
Unaided : if it drown in some wide sea,
Save but thyself, my words are saved with thee.

PYLADES.

For thy sake and for mine 'tis fairer so.
Now let me hear his name to whom I go
In Argolis, and how my words should run.

IPHIGENIA (*repeating the words by heart*).

Say : "To Orestes, Agamemnon's son,
She that was slain in Aulis, dead to Greece
Yet quick, Iphigenia sendeth peace : "

ORESTES.

Iphigenia ! Where ? Back from the dead ?

IPHIGENIA.

'Tis I. But speak not, lest thou break my thread.--
"Take me to Argos, brother, ere I die,
Back from the Friendless Peoples and the high
Altar of Her whose bloody rites I wreak."

ORESTES (*aside*).

Where am I, Pylades ? How shall I speak ?

IPHIGENIA.

"Else one in grief forsaken shall, like shame,
Haunt thee."

PYLADES (*aside*).

Orestes !

IPHIGENIA (*overhearing him*).

Yes : that is the name.

PYLADES.

Ye Gods above !

IPHIGENIA.

Why callest thou on God
For words of mine ?

PYLADES.

'Tis nothing. 'Twas a road
My thoughts had turned. Speak on.—No need
for us
To question ; we shall hear things marvellous.

IPHIGENIA.

Tell him that Artemis my soul did save,
I wot not how, and to the altar gave
A fawn instead ; the which my father slew,
Not seeing, deeming that the sword he drew
Struck me. But she had borne me far away
And left me in this land.—I charge thee, say
So much. It all is written on the scroll.

PYLADES.

An easy charge thou layest on my soul,
A glad oath on thine own. I wait no more,
But here fulfil the service that I swore.

Orestes, take this tablet which I bear
To thine own hand, thy sister's messenger.

ORESTES.

I take it, but I reck not of its scrip
Nor message. Too much joy is at my lip.

Sister ! Belovèd ! Wildered though I be,
My arms believe not, yet they crave for thee.
Now, filled with wonder, give me my delight !

[He goes to embrace her. She stands speechless.]

LEADER.

Stranger, forbear ! No living man hath right
To touch that robe. The Goddess were defiled !

ORESTES.

O Sister mine, O my dead father's child,
Agamemnon's child ; take me and have no fear,
Beyond all dreams 'tis I thy brother here.

IPHIGENIA.

My brother ? Thou ? . . . Peace ! Mock at me
no more.
Argos is bright with him and Nauplia's shore.

ORESTES.

Unhappy one ! Thou hast no brother there.

IPHIGENIA.

Orestes . . . thou ? Whom Clytemnestra bare ?

ORESTES.

To Atreus' firstborn son, thy sire and mine.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou sayst it : Oh, give me some proof, some sign !

ORESTES.

What sign thou wilt. Ask anything from home.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, t h o u speak : 'tis from thee the sign should come.

ORESTES.

That will I.—First, old tales Electra told.
Thou knowst how Pelops' princes warred of old ?

IPHIGENIA.

I know : the Golden Lamb that wrought their doom.

ORESTES.

Thine own hand wove that story on the loom. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

How sweet ! Thou movest near old memories.

ORESTES.

With a great Sun back beaten in the skies.

IPHIGENIA.

Fine linen threads I used. The memories come,

ORESTES.

And mother gave thee shrift-water from home
For Aulis. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

I remember. Not so fair
A day did drink that water !

ORESTES.

And thine hair
They brought us for thy dying gift, and gave
To mother.

IPHIGENIA.

Yes : for record on the grave
I sent it, where this head should never lie.

ORESTES.

Another token, seen of mine own eye.
The ancient lance that leapt in Pelops' hand,
To win his bride, the virgin of the land,
And smite Oenomaus, in thy chamber hid. . . .

IPHIGENIA (*falling into his arms*).

Belovèd ! Oh, no other, for indeed
Belovèd art thou ! In mine arms at last,
Orestes far away.

ORESTES.

And thou in mine, the evil dreaming past,
Back from the dead this day !
Yet through the joy tears, tears and sorrow loud
Are o'er mine eyes and thine eyes, like a cloud.

IPHIGENIA.

Is this the babe I knew,
The little babe, light lifted like a bird ?
O heart of mine, too blest for any word,
What shall I say or do ?
Beyond all wonders, beyond stories heard,
This joy is here and true.

ORESTES.

Could we but stay thus joined for evermore !

IPHIGENIA.

A joy is mine I may not understand,
Friends, and a fear, lest sudden from my hand
This dream will melt and soar
Up to the fiery skies from whence it came.
O Argos land, O hearth and holy flame
That old Cyclôpes lit,
I bless ye that he lives, that he is grown,
A light and strength, my brother and mine own ;
I bless your name for it.

ORESTES.

One blood we are ; so much is well. But Fate,
Sister, hath not yet made us fortunate.

IPHIGENIA.

O most unfortunate ! Did I not feel,
Whose father, misery-hearted, at my bare
Throat held the steel ?

ORESTES.

Woe's me ! Methinks even now I see thee there.

IPHIGENIA.

No love-song of Achilles ! Crafty arms
Drew me to that cold sleep,
And tears, blind tears amid the altar psalms
And noise of them that weep—
That was my cleansing !

ORESTES.

My heart too doth bleed,
To think our father wrought so dire a deed.

IPHIGENIA.

My life hath known no father. Any road
To any end may run,
As god's will drives ; else. . . .

ORESTES.

Else, unhappy one,
Thyself had spilt this day thy brother's blood !

IPHIGENIA.

Ah God, my cruel deed ! . . . 'Twas horrible.
'Twas horrible. . . . O brother ! Did my heart
Endure it ? . . . And things fell
Right by so frail a chance ; and here thou art.
Bloody my hand had been,
My heart heavy with sin.
And now, what end cometh ?
Shall Chance yet comfort me,
Finding a way for thee
Back from the Friendless Strand,
Back from the place of death—
Ere yet the slayers come
And thy blood sink in the sand—
Home unto Argos, home ? . . .
Hard heart, so swift to slay,
Is there to life no way ? . . .
No ship ! . . . And how by land ? . . .
A rush of feet
Out to the waste alone.
Nay : 'twere to meet
Death, amid tribes unknown
And trackless ways of the waste. . . .
Surely the sea were best.
Back by the narrow bar
To the Dark Blue Gate ! . . .
Ah God, too far, too far ! . . .
Desolate ! Desolate !
What god or man, what unimagined flame,
Can cleave this road where no road is, and bring
To us last wrecks of Agamemnon's name,
Peace from long suffering ?

LEADER.

Lo, deeds of wonder and beyond surmise,
Not as tales told, but seen of mine own eyes.

PYLADES.

Men that have found the arms of those they love
Would fain long linger in the joy thereof.
But we, Orestes, have no respite yet
For tears or tenderness. Let us forget
All but the one word Freedom, calling us
To live, not die by altars barbarous.
Think not of joy in this great hour, nor lose
Fortune's first hold. Not thus do wise men use.

ORESTES.

I think that Fortune watcheth o'er our lives,
Surer than we. But well said : he who strives
Will find his gods strive for him equally.

IPHIGENIA.

He shall not check us so, nor baffle me
Of this one word. How doth Electra move
Through life ? Ye twain are all I have to love.

ORESTES.

A wife and happy : this man hath her hand.

IPHIGENIA.

And what man's son is he, and of what land ?

ORESTES.

Son of King Strophios he is called of men.

IPHIGENIA.

Whom Atreus' daughter wed ?—My kinsman then.

ORESTES.

Our cousin, and my true and only friend.

IPHIGENIA.

He was not born, when I went to mine end.

ORESTES.

No, Strophios had no child for many a year.

IPHIGENIA.

I give thee hail, husband of one so dear.

ORESTES.

My more than kinsman, saviour in my need !

IPHIGENIA.

But mother. . . . Speak : how did ye dare that deed ?

ORESTES.

Our father's wrongs. . . . But let that story be.

IPHIGENIA.

And she to slay her king ! What cause had she ?

ORESTES.

Forget her ! . . . And no tale for thee it is.

IPHIGENIA.

So be it.—And thou art Lord of Argolis ?

ORESTES.

Our uncle rules. I walk an exile's ways.

IPHIGENIA.

Doth he so trample on our fallen days ?

ORESTES.

Nay : there be those that drive me, Shapes of Dread.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah !
That frenzy on the shore ! 'Tis as they said. . . .

ORESTES.

They saw me in mine hour. It needs must be.

IPHIGENIA.

'Twas our dead mother's Furies hounding thee !

ORESTES.

My mouth is bloody with the curb they ride.

IPHIGENIA.

What brought thee here beyond the Friendless Tide ?

ORESTES.

What leads me everywhere—Apollo's word.

IPHIGENIA.

Seeking what end ?—Or may the tale be heard ?

ORESTES.

Nay, I can tell thee all. It needs must be
The whole tale of my days of misery.

When this sore evil that we speak not of
Lit on my hand, this way and that they drove
My body, till the God by diverse paths
Led me to Athens, that the nameless Wraths
Might bring me before judgment. For that land
A pure tribunal hath, where Ares' hand,
Red from an ancient stain, by Zeus was sent
For justice. Thither came I; and there went
God's hate before me, that at first no man
Would give me shelter. Then some few began
To pity, and set out for me aloof
One table. There I sate within their roof,
But without word they signed to me, as one
Apart, unspoken to, unlooked upon,

Lest touch of me should stain their meat and sup.
 And every man in measure filled his cup
 And gave me mine, and took their joy apart,
 While I sat silent ; for I had no heart
 To upbraid the hosts that fed me. On I wrought
 In my deep pain, feigning to mark them not.

And now, men say, mine evil days are made
 A rite among them and the cups are laid
 Apart for each. The rule abideth still.

Howbeit, when I was come to Ares' Hill
 They gave me judgment. On one stone I stood,
 On one she that was eldest of the brood
 That hunted me so long. And many a word
 Touching my mother's death was spoke and heard,
 Till Phoebus rose to save me. Even lay
 The votes of Death and Life ; when, lo, a sway
 Of Pallas' arm, and free at last I stood
 From that death grapple. But the Shapes of Blood—
 Some did accept the judgment, and of grace
 Consent to make their house beneath that place
 In darkness. Others still consented not,
 But clove to me the more, like bloodhounds hot
 On the dying ; till to Phoebus' house once more
 I crept, and cast me starving on the floor
 Facing the Holy Place, and made my cry :
 " Lord Phoebus, here I am come, and here will die,
 Unless thou save me, as thou hast betrayed."
 And, lo, from out that dark and golden shade
 A voice : " Go, seek the Taurian citadel :
 Seize there the carven Artemis that fell
 From heaven, and stablish it on Attic soil.
 So comes thy freedom."

[IPHIGENIA *shrinks*.

Sister, in this toil

Help us !—If once that image I may win
 That day shall end my madness and my sin :
 And thou, to Argos o'er the sundering foam
 My many-oarèd barque shall bear thee home.

O sister loved and lost, O pitying face,
 Help my great peril ; help our father's race.
 For lost am I and perished all the powers
 Of Pelops, save that heavenly thing be ours !

LEADER.

Strange wrath of God hath fallen, like hot rain,
 On Tantalus' house : he leadeth them through
 pain.

IPHIGENIA.

Long ere you came my heart hath yearned to be
 In Argos, brother, and so near to thee :
 But now—thy will is mine. To ease thy pain,
 To lift our father's house to peace again,
 And hate no more my murderers—aye, 'tis good.
 Perchance to clean this hand that sought thy blood,
 And save my people . . .

But the goddess' eyes,
 How dream we to deceive them ? Or what wise
 Escape the King, when on his sight shall fall
 The blank stone of the empty pedestal ? . . .
 I needs must die. . . . What better can I do ?

And yet, one chance there is : could I but go
 Together with the image : couldst thou bear
 Both on the leaping seas ! The risk were fair.
 But how ?

Nay, I must wait then and be slain :
 Thou shalt walk free in Argolis again,
 And all life smile on thee. . . . Dearest, we need
 Not shrink from that. I shall by mine own deed
 Have saved thee. And a man gone from the earth
 Is wept for. Women are but little worth.

ORESTES.

My mother and then thou ? It may not be.
 This hand hath blood enough. I stand with thee
 One-hearted here, be it for life or death,
 And either bear thee, if God favoureth,
 With me to Greece and home, or else lie here
 Dead at thy side.—But mark me : if thou fear
 Lest Artemis be wroth, how can that be ?
 Hath not her brother's self commanded me
 To bear to Greece her image ?—Oh, he knew
 Her will ! He knew that in this land we two
 Must meet once more. All that so far hath past
 Doth show his work. He will not at the last
 Fail. We shall yet see Argos, thou and I.

IPHIGENIA.

To steal for thee the image, yet not die
 Myself ! 'Tis that we need. 'Tis that doth kill
 My hope. Else. . . . Oh, God knows I have the
 will !

ORESTES.

How if we slew your savage king ?

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, no :

He sheltered me, a stranger.

ORESTES.

Even so,

If it bring life for me and thee, the deed
May well be dared.

IPHIGENIA.

I could not. . . . Nay ; indeed
I thank thee for thy daring.

ORESTES.

Canst thou hide
My body in the shrine ?

IPHIGENIA.

There to abide
Till nightfall, and escape ?

ORESTES.

Even so ; the night
Is the safe time for robbers, as the light
For just men.

IPHIGENIA.

There be sacred watchers there
Who needs must see us.

ORESTES.

Gods above ! What prayer
Can help us then ?

IPHIGENIA.

I think I dimly see
One chance.

ORESTES.

What chance ? Speak out thy fantasy.

IPHIGENIA.

On thine affliction I would build my way.

ORESTES.

Women have strange devices.

IPHIGENIA.

I would say
Thou com'st from Hellas with thy mother's blood
Upon thee.

ORESTES.

Use my shame, if any good
Will follow.

IPHIGENIA.

Therefore, an offence most high
It were to slay thee to the goddess !

ORESTES.

Why ?

Though I half guess.

IPHIGENIA.

Thy body is unclean.—
Oh, I will fill them with the fear of sin !

ORESTES.

What help is that for the Image ?

IPHIGENIA.

I will crave
To cleanse thee in the breaking of the wave.

ORESTES.

That leaves the goddess still inside her shrine,
And 'tis for her we sailed.

IPHIGENIA.

A touch of thine
Defiled her. She too must be purified.

ORESTES.

Where shall it be? Thou knowest where the tide
Sweeps up in a long channel?

IPHIGENIA.

Yes! And where
Your ship, I guess, lies moored.

ORESTES.

Whose hand will bear—
Should it be thine?—the image from her throne?

IPHIGENIA.

No hand of man may touch it save mine own.

ORESTES.

And Pylades—what part hath he herein?

IPHIGENIA.

The same as thine. He bears the self-same sin.

ORESTES.

How wilt thou work the plan—hid from the king
Or known?

IPHIGENIA.

To hide it were a hopeless thing. . . .
Oh, I will face him, make him yield to me.

ORESTES.

Well, fifty oars lie waiting on the sea.

IPHIGENIA.

Aye, there comes t h y work, till an end be made.

ORESTES.

Good. It needs only that these women aid
Our secret. Do thou speak with them, and find
Words of persuasion. Power is in the mind
Of woman to wake pity.—For the rest,
God knoweth : may it all end for the best !

IPHIGENIA.

O women, you my comrades, in your eyes
I look to read my fate. In you it lies,
That either I find peace, or be cast down
To nothing, robbed for ever of mine own—
Brother, and home, and sister pricelessly
Beloved.—Are we not women, you and I,
A broken race, to one another true,
And strong in our shared secrets ? Help me through
This strait ; keep hid the secret of our flight,
And share our peril ! Honour shineth bright
On her whose lips are steadfast. . . . Heaven
above !

Three souls, but one in fortune, one in love,
Thou seest us go—is it to death or home ?
If home, then surely, surely, there shall come

Part of our joy to thee. I swear, I swear
To aid thee also home. . . .

*[She goes to one after another, and presently
kneels embracing the knees of the LEADER.]*

I make my prayer
By that right hand ; to thee, too, by that dear
Cheek ; by thy knees ; by all that is not here
Of things beloved, by mother, father, child—
Thou hadst a child !—How say ye ? Have ye smiled
Or turned from me ? For if ye turn away,
I and my brother are lost things this day.

LEADER.

Be of good heart, sweet mistress. Only go
To happiness. No child of man shall know
From us thy secret. Hear me, Zeus on high !

IPHIGENIA (*rising*).

God bless you for that word, and fill your eye
With light !— *[Turning to ORESTES and PYLADES.]*

But now, to work ! Go thou, and thou,
In to the deeper shrine. King Thoas now
Should soon be here to question if the price
Be yet paid of the strangers' sacrifice.

[ORESTES and PYLADES go in.]

Thou Holy One, that on the shrouded sand
Of Aulis saved me from a father's hand
Blood-maddened, save me now, and save these
twain.

Else shall Apollo's lips, through thy disdain,
Be no more true nor trusted in men's eyes.
Come from the friendless shore, the cruel skies,

Come back : what mak'st thou here, when o'er the
A clean and joyous land doth call for thee?

[She follows the men into the Temple]

CHORUS.

[Strophe]

Bird of the sea rocks, of the bursting spray,
O halcyon bird,
That wheel'st crying, crying, on thy way ;
Who knoweth grief can read the tale of thee :
One love long lost, one song for ever heard
And wings that sweep the sea.

Sister, I too beside the sea complain,
A bird that hath no wing.
Oh, for a kind Greek market-place again,
For Artemis that healeth woman's pain ;
Here I stand hungering.
Give me the little hill above the sea,
The palm of Delos fringed delicately,
The young sweet laurel and the olive-tree
Grey-leaved and glimmering ;
O Isle of Leto, Isle of pain and love ;
The Orb'd Water and the spell thereof ;
Where still the Swan, minstrel of things to be,
Doth serve the Muse and sing !

[Antistrophe]

Ah, the old tears, the old and blinding tears
I gave God then,
When my town fell, and noise was in mine ears
Of crashing towers, and forth they guided me
Through spears and lifted oars and angry men
Out to an unknown sea.

They bought my flesh with gold, and sore afraid
 I came to this dark East
 To serve, in thrall to Agamemnon's maid,
 This Huntress Artemis, to whom is paid
 The blood of no slain beast ;
 Yet all is bloody where I dwell, Ah me !
 Envy, envying that misery
 That through all life hath endured changelessly.
 For hard things borne from birth
 Take iron of man's heart, and hurt the less.
 This change that paineth ; and the bitterness
 Of life's decay when joy hath ceased to be
 That makes dark all the earth.

Behold,

[*Strophe 2.*

Two score and ten there be
 Rowers that row for thee,
 And a wild hill air, as if Pan were there,
 Shall sound on the Argive sea,
 Piping to set thee free.

Or is it the stricken string
 Of Apollo's lyre doth sing
 Mournfully, as he guideth thee
 To Athens, the land of spring ;
 While I wait wearying ?

Oh, the wind and the oar,
 When the great sail swells before,
 With sheets astrain, like a horse on the rein ;
 And on, through the race and roar,
 She feels for the farther shore.

Ah me, [Antistrophe 2.
To rise upon wings and hold
Straight on up the steeps of gold
Where the joyous Sun in fire doth run,
Till the wings should faint and fold
O'er the house that was mine of old :

Or watch where the glade below
With a marriage dance doth glow,
And a child will glide from her mother's side
Out, out, where the dancers flow :
As I did, long ago.

Oh, battles of gold and rare
Raiment and Starrèd hair,
And bright veils crossed amid tresses tossed
In a dusk of dancing air !
O Youth and the days that were !

Enter KING THOAS, with Soldiers.

THOAS.

Where is the warden of this sacred gate,
The Greek woman ? Is her work ended yet
With those two strangers ? Do their bodies lie
Aflame now in the rock-cleft sanctuary ?

LEADER.

Here is herself, O King, to give thee word.

*Enter, from the Temple, IPHIGENIA, carrying
the Image on high.*

THOAS.

How, child of Agamemnon ! Hast thou stirred
From her eternal base, and to the sun
Bearest in thine own arms, the Holy One ?

IPHIGENIA.

Back, Lord ! No step beyond the pillared way.

THOAS.

But how ? Some rule is broken ?

IPHIGENIA.

I unsay

That word. Be all unspoken and unwrought !

THOAS.

What means this greeting strange ? Disclose thy
thought.

IPHIGENIA.

Unclean the prey was that ye caught, O King.

THOAS.

Who showed thee so ? Thine own imagining ?

IPHIGENIA.

The Image stirred and shuddered from its seat.

THOAS.

Itself? . . . Some shock of earthquake loosened it.

IPHIGENIA.

Itself. And the eyes closed one breathing space.

THOAS.

But why? For those two men's bloodguiltiness?

IPHIGENIA.

That, nothing else. For, Oh, their guilt is sore.

THOAS.

They killed some of my herdsmen on the shore?

IPHIGENIA.

Their sin was brought from home, not gathered
here.

THOAS.

What? I must know this.—Make thy story clear.

IPHIGENIA. (*She puts the Image down and moves
nearer to* THOAS.)

The men have slain their mother.

THOAS.

God ! And these
Be Greeks !

IPHIGENIA.

They both are hunted out of Greece.

THOAS.

For this thou hast brought the Image to the sun ?

IPHIGENIA.

The fire of heaven can cleanse all malison.

THOAS.

How didst thou first hear of their deed of shame ?

IPHIGENIA.

When the Image hid its eyes, I questioned them.

THOAS.

Good. Greece hath taught thee many a subtle art.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, they too had sweet words to move my heart.

THOAS.

Sweet words ? How, did they bring some news of
Greece ?

IPHIGENIA.

Orestes, my one brother, lives in peace.

THOAS.

Surely! Good news to make thee spare their lives. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

My father too in Argos lives and thrives.

THOAS.

While thou didst think but of the goddess' laws!

IPHIGENIA.

Do I not hate all Greeks? Have I not cause?

THOAS.

Good cause. But now. . . . What service should
be paid?

IPHIGENIA.

The Law of long years needs must be obeyed.

THOAS.

To work then, with thy sword and handwashing!

IPHIGENIA.

First I must shrive them with some cleansing thing.

THOAS.

What ? Running water, or the sea's salt spray ?

IPHIGENIA.

The sea doth wash all the world's ills away.

THOAS.

For sure. 'Twill make them cleaner for the knife.

IPHIGENIA.

And my hand, too, cleaner for all my life.

THOAS.

Well, the waves lap close by the temple floor.

IPHIGENIA.

We need a secret place. I must do more.

THOAS.

Some rite unseen ? 'Tis well. Go where thou wilt.

IPHIGENIA.

The Image likewise must be purged of guilt.

THOAS.

The stain hath touched it of that mother's
blood?

IPHIGENIA.

I durst not move it else, from where it stood.

THOAS.

How good thy godliness and forethought! Aye,
Small wonder all our people holds thee high.

IPHIGENIA.

Dost know then what I fain would have?

THOAS.

'Tis thine to speak and it shall be.

IPHIGENIA.

Put bondage on the strangers both. . . .

THOAS.

Why bondage? Whither can they flee?

IPHIGENIA.

Put not thy faith in any Greek.

THOAS (*to ATTENDANTS*).

Ho, men ! Some thongs and fetters, go !

IPHIGENIA.

Stay ; let them lead the strangers here, outside the shrine. . . .

THOAS.

It shall be so.

IPHIGENIA.

And lay dark raiment on their heads. . . .

THOAS.

To veil them, lest the Sun should see.

IPHIGENIA.

And lend me some of thine own spears.

THOAS.

This company shall go with thee.

IPHIGENIA.

Next, send through all the city streets a herald. . . .

THOAS.

Aye ; and what to say ?

IPHIGENIA.

That no man living stir abroad.

THOAS.

The stain of blood might cross their way.

IPHIGENIA.

Aye, sin like theirs doth spread contagion.

THOAS (*to an ATTENDANT*).

Forth, and publish my command. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

That none stir forth—nor look. . . .

THOAS.

Nor look.—How well thou carest for the land !

IPHIGENIA.

For one whom I am bound to love.

THOAS.

Indeed, I think thou hat'st me not.

IPHIGENIA.

And thou meanwhile, here at the temple, wait, O
King, and . . .

THOAS.

Wait for what ?

IPHIGENIA.

Purge all the shrine with fire.

THOAS.

'Twill all be clean before you come again.

IPHIGENIA.

And while the strangers pass thee close, seeking the
sea. . . .

THOAS.

What wouldst thou then ?

IPHIGENIA.

Put darkness on thine eyes.

THOAS.

Mine eyes might drink the evil of their crime ?

IPHIGENIA.

And, should I seem to stay too long. . . .

THOAS.

Too long ? How shall I judge the time ?

IPHIGENIA.

Be not dismayed.

THOAS.

Perform thy rite all duly. We have time to spare.

IPHIGENIA.

And God but grant this cleansing end as I desire !

THOAS.

I join thy prayer.

IPHIGENIA.

The door doth open ! See, they lead the strangers
from the cell within,

And raiment holy and young lambs, whose blood
shall shrive the blood of Sin.

And, lo, the light of sacred fires, and things of secret
power, arrayed

By mine own hand to cleanse aright the strangers, to
cleanse Leto's Maid.

[She takes up the Image again.]

There passeth here a holy thing : begone, I charge
ye, from the road,

O whoso by these sacred gates may dwell, hand-
consecrate to God,

What man hath marriage in his heart, what woman
goeth great with child,

Begone and tremble from this road : fly swiftly, lest
ye be defiled.—

Queen and Virgin, Leto-born, have pity ! Let me
 cleanse this stain,

And pray to thee where pray I would : a clean
 house shall be thine again,

And we at last win happiness.—Behold, I speak but
 as I dare ;

The rest. . . . Oh, God is wise, and thou, my
 Mistress, thou canst read my prayer.

*[The procession passes out, THOAS and the by-
 standers veiled ; Attendants in front, then
 IPHIGENIA with the Image, then veiled
 Soldiers, then ORESTES and PYLADES bound,
 the bonds held by other veiled Soldiers
 following them. THOAS goes into the
 Temple.]*

CHORUS.

[Strophe.]

Oh, fair the fruits of Leto blow :
 A Virgin, one, with joyous bow,
 And one a Lord of flashing locks,
 Wise in the harp, Apollo :
 She bore them amid Delian rocks,
 Hid in a fruited hollow.

But forth she fared from that low reef,
 Sea-cradle of her joy and grief.
 A crag she knew more near the skies
 And lit with wilder water,
 That leaps with joy of Dionyse :
 There brought she son and daughter.

And there, behold, an ancient Snake,
Wine-eyed, bronze-gleaming in the brake
Of deep-leaved laurel, ruled the dell,
Sent by old Earth from under
Strange caves to guard her oracle—
A thing of fear and wonder.

Thou, Phoebus, still a new-born thing,
Meet in thy mother's arms to lie,
Didst kill the Snake and crown thee king,
In Pytho's land of prophecy :
Thine was the tripod and the chair
Of golden truth ; and thronèd there,
Hard by the streams of Castaly,
Beneath the untrodden portal
Of Earth's mid stone there flows from thee
Wisdom for all things mortal.

[*Antistrophe.*

He slew the Snake ; he cast, men say,
Themis, the child of Earth, away
From Pytho and her hallowed stream ;
Then Earth, in dark derision,
Brought forth the Peoples of the Dream
And all the tribes of Vision.

And men besought them ; and from deep
Confused underworlds of sleep
They showed blind things that erst had been
And are and yet shall follow.
So did avenge that old Earth Queen
Her child's wrong on Apollo.

Then swiftly flew that conquering one
 To Zeus on high, and round the throne
 Twining a small indignant hand,
 Prayed him to send redeeming
 To Pytho from that troublous band
 Sprung from the darks of dreaming.

Zeus laughed to see the babe, I trow,
 So swift to claim his golden rite ;
 He laughed and bowed his head, in vow
 To still those voices of the night.
 And so from out the eyes of men
 That dark dream-truth was lost again ;
 And Phoebus, thronèd where the throng
 Prays at the golden portal,
 Again doth shed in sunlit song
 Hope unto all things mortal.

Enter a MESSENGER, running.

MESSENGER.

Ho, watchers of the fane ! Ho, altar-guard,
 Where is King Thoas gone ? Undo the barred
 Portals, and call the King ! The King I seek.

LEADER.

What tidings—if unbidden I may speak ?

MESSENGER.

The strangers both are gone, and we beguiled,
 By some dark plot of Agamemnon's child :

Fled from the land ! And on a barque of Greece
Then bear the heaven-sent shape of Artemis.

LEADER.

Thy tale is past belief.—Go, swiftly on,
And find the King. He is but newly gone.

MESSENGER.

Where went he ? He must know of what has passed !

LEADER.

I know not where he went. But follow fast
And seek him. Thou wilt light on him ere long.

MESSENGER.

See there ! The treason of a woman's tongue !
Ye all are in the plot, I warrant ye !

LEADER.

Thy words are mad ! What are the men to me ? . . .
Go to the palace, go !

MESSENGER (*seeing the great knocker on the
Temple door*).

I will not stir
Till word be come by this good messenger
If Thoas be within these gates or no.—

[*Thundering at the door.*

Ho, loose the portals ! Ye within ! What ho !
 Open, and tell our master one doth stand
 Without here, with strange evil in his hand.

Enter THOAS from the Temple.

THOAS.

Who dares before this portal consecrate
 Make uproar and lewd battering of the gate ?
 Thy noise hath broke the Altar's ancient peace.

MESSENGER.

Ye Gods ! They swore to me—and bade me cease
 My search—the King was gone. And all the
 while . . . !

THOAS.

These women ? How ? What sought they by such
 guile ?

MESSENGER.

Of them hereafter !—Give me first thine ear
 For greater things. The virgin minister
 That served our altar, she hath fled from this
 And stolen the dread Shape of Artemis,
 With those two Greeks. The cleansing was a lie.

THOAS.

She fled ?—What wild hope whispered her to fly ?

MESSENGER.

The hope to save Orestes. Wonder on !

THOAS.

Orestes—how ? Not Clytemnestra's son ?

MESSENGER.

And our pledged altar-offering. 'Tis the same.

THOAS.

O marvel beyond marvel ! By what name
More rich in wonder can I name thee right ?

MESSENGER.

Give not thy mind to that. Let ear and sight
Be mine awhile ; and when thou hast heard the whole
Devise how best to trap them ere the goal.

THOAS.

Aye, tell thy tale. Our Tauric seas stretch far,
Where no man may escape my wand of war.

MESSENGER.

Soon as we reached that headland of the sea,
Whereby Orestes' barque lay secretly,
We soldiers holding, by thine own commands,
The chain that bound the strangers, in our hands,

There Agamemnon's daughter made a sign,
 Bidding us wait far off, for some divine
 And secret fire of cleansing she must make.
 We could but do her will. We saw her take
 The chain in her own hands and walk behind.
 Indeed thy servants bore a troubled mind,
 O King, but how do else? So time went by.
 Meanwhile to make it seem she wrought some high
 Magic, she cried aloud : then came the long
 Drone of some strange and necromantic song,
 As though she toiled to cleanse that blood ; and there
 Sat we, that long time, waiting. Till a fear
 O'ertook us, that the men might slip their chain
 And strike the priestess down and plunge amain
 For safety : yet the dread our eyes to fill
 With sights unbidden held us, and we still
 Sat silent. But at last all spoke as one,
 Forbid or not forbid, to hasten on
 And find them. On we went, and suddenly,
 With oarage poised, like wings upon the sea,
 An Argive ship we saw, her fifty men
 All benched, and on the shore, with every chain
 Cast off, our strangers, standing by the stern !
 The prow was held by stay-poles : turn by turn
 The anchor-cable rose ; some men had strung
 Long ropes into a ladder, which they swung
 Over the side for those two Greeks to climb.

The plot was open, and we lost no time
 But flew to seize the cables and the maid,
 And through the stern dragged out the steering-
 blade,

To spoil her course, and shouted : " Ho, what way
 Is this, to sail the seas and steal away

An holy image and its minister ?

What man art thou, and what man's son, to bear
Our priestess from the land ?" And clear thereon
He spoke : " Orestes, Agamemnon's son,
And brother to this maid, whom here in peace
I bear, my long lost sister, back to Greece."

We none the less clung fast to her, and strove
To drag her to thy judgment-seat. Thereof
Came trouble and bruised jaws. For neither they
Nor we had weapons with us. But the way
Hard-beaten fist and heel from those two men
Rained upon ribs and flank—again, again . . .
To touch was to fall gasping ! Aye, they laid
Their mark on all of us, till back we fled
With bleeding crowns, and some with blinded eyes,
Up a rough bank of rock. There on the rise
We found good stones and stood, and fought again.

But archers then came out, and sent a rain
Of arrows from the poop, and drove us back.
And just then—for a wave came, long and black,
And swept them shoreward—lest the priestess' gown
Should feel the sea, Orestes stooping down
Caught her on his left shoulder : then one stride
Out through the sea, the ladder at the side
Was caught, and there amid the benches stood
The maid of Argos and the carven wood
Of heaven, the image of God's daughter high.

And up from the mid galley rose a cry :
" For Greece ! For Greece, O children of the shores
Of storm ! Give way, and let her feel your oars ;
Churn the long waves to foam. The prize is won,
The prize we followed, on and ever on,
Friendless beyond the blue Symplêgades."

A roar of glad throats echoed down the breeze
 And fifty oars struck, and away she flew.
 And while the shelter lasted, she ran true
 Full for the harbour-mouth ; but ere she well
 Reached it, the weather caught her, and the swell
 Was strong. Then sudden in her teeth a squall
 Drove the sail bellying back. The men withal
 Worked with set teeth, kicking against the stream.
 But back, still back, striving as in a dream,
 She drifted. Then the damsel rose and prayed :
 " O Child of Leto, save thy chosen maid
 From this dark land to Hellas, and forgive
 My theft this day, and let these brave men live.
 Dost thou not love thy brother, Holy One ?
 What marvel if I also love mine own ? "

The sailors cried a paean to her prayers,
 And set those brown and naked arms of theirs,
 Half-mad with strain, quick swinging chime on chime
 To the helmsman's shout. But vainly ; all the time
 Nearer and nearer rockward they were pressed.
 One of our men was wading to his breast,
 Some others roping a great grappling-hook,
 While I sped hot-foot to the town, to look
 For thee, my Prince, and tell thee what doth pass.

Come with me, Lord. Bring manacles of brass
 And bitter bonds. For now, unless the wave
 Fall sudden calm, no mortal power can save
 Orestes. There is One that rules the sea
 Who grieved for Troy and hates her enemy :
 Poseidon's self will give into thine hand
 And ours this dog, this troubler of the land—
 The priestess, too, who, recking not what blood
 Ran red in Aulis, hath betrayed her god !

LEADER.

Woe, woe ! To fall in these men's hands again,
Mistress, and die, and see thy brother slain !

THOAS.

Ho, all ye dwellers of my savage town
Set saddle on your steeds, and gallop down
To watch the heads, and gather what is cast
Alive from this Greek wreck. We shall make fast
By God's help, the blasphemers.—Send a corps
Out in good boats a furlong from the shore ;
So we shall either snare them on the seas
Or ride them down by land, and at our ease
Fling them down gulfs of rock, or pale them high
On stakes in the sun, to feed our birds and die.

Women : you knew this plot. Each one of you
Shall know, before the work I have to do
Is done, what torment is.—Enough. A clear
Task is afoot. I must not linger here.

*[While THOAS is moving off, his men shouting
and running before and behind him, there
comes a sudden blasting light and thunder-
roll, and ATHENA is seen in the air con-
fronting them.]*

ATHENA.

Ho, whither now, so hot upon the prey,
King Thoas ? It is I that bid thee stay,
Athena, child of Zeus. Turn back this flood
Of wrathful men, and get thee temperate blood.

Apollo's word and Fate's ordained path
Have led Orestes here, to escape the wrath

Of Them that Hate. To Argos he must bring
His sister's life, and guide that Holy Thing
Which fell from heaven, in mine own land to
dwell.

So shall his pain have rest, and all be well.
Thou hast heard my speech, O King. No death
from thee

May snare Orestes between rocks and sea :
Poseidon for my love doth make the sore
Waves gentle, and set free his labouring oar.

And thou, O far away—for, far or near
A goddess speaketh and thy heart must hear—
Go on thy ways, Orestes, bearing home
The Image and thy sister. When ye come
To god-built Athens, lo, a land there is
Half hid on Attica's last boundaries,
A little land, hard by Karystus' Rock,
But sacred. It is called by Attic folk
Halae. Build there a temple, and bestow
Therein thine Image, that the world may know
The tale of Tauris and of thee, cast out
From pole to pole of Greece, a blood-hound rout
Of ill thoughts driving thee. So through the
whole

Of time to Artemis the Tauropole
Shall men make hymns at Halae. And withal
Give them this law. At each high festival,
A sword, in record of thy death undone,
Shall touch a man's throat, and the red blood
run—

One drop, for old religion's sake. In this
Shall live that old red rite of Artemis.

And thou, Iphigenia, by the stair
Of Brauron in the rocks, the Key shalt bear
Of Artemis. There shalt thou live and die,
And there have burial. And a gift shall lie
Above thy shrine, fair raiment undefiled
Left upon earth by mothers dead with child.

Ye last, O exiled women, true of heart
And faithful found, ye shall in peace depart,
Each to her home : behold Athena's will.

Orestes, long ago on Ares' Hill
I saved thee, when the votes of Death and Life
Lay equal : and henceforth, when men at strife
So stand, mid equal votes of Life and Death,
My law shall hold that Mercy conquereth.
Begone. Lead forth thy sister from this shore
In peace ; and thou, Thoas, be wroth no more.

THOAS.

Most high Athena, he who bows not low
His head to God's word spoken, I scarce know
How such an one doth live. Orestes hath
Fled with mine Image hence. . . . I bear no wrath.
Nor yet against his sister. There is naught,
Methinks, of honour in a battle fought
'Gainst gods. The strength is theirs. Let those two
fare
Forth to thy land and plant mine Image there.
I wish them well.

These bondwomen no less
I will send free to Greece and happiness,

And stay my galleys' oars, and bid this brand
Be sheathed again, Goddess, at thy command.

ATHENA.

'Tis well, O King. For that which needs must be
Holdeth the high gods as it holdeth thee.

Winds of the north, O winds that laugh and run,
Bear now to Athens Agamemnon's son :
Myself am with you, o'er long leagues of foam
Guiding my sister's hallowed Image home.

[She floats away.]

CHORUS.

Some Women.

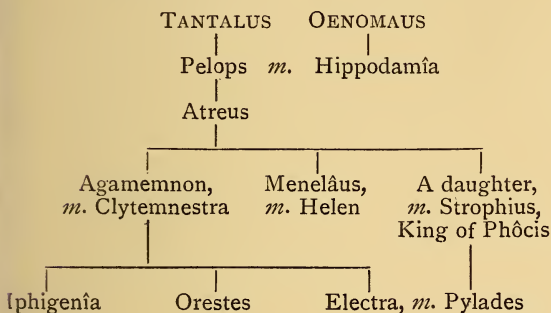
Go forth in bliss, O ye whose lot
God shieldeth, that ye perish not !

Others.

O great in our dull world of clay,
And great in heaven's undying gleam,
Pallas, thy bidding we obey :
And bless thee, for mine ears have heard
The joy and wonder of a word
Beyond my dream, beyond my dream.

NOTES TO IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

GENEALOGY OF THE CHIEF PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE PLAY



(The names "Iphigeniâ," "Hippodamîa" have the last long, as in "Obadiah"; similarly, "Menelaus" rhymes with "slay us." But Oenomaus and Strophius have the penultimate short.)

P. 3, l. 1.]—Oenomaüs, King of Elis, offered his daughter and his kingdom to any man who should beat him in a chariot race; those who failed he slew. Pelops challenged him and won the race through a trick of his servant, Myrtilus, who treacherously took the linchpins out of Oenomaüs's chariot. Oenomaüs was thrown out and killed; Pelops took the kingdom, but in remorse or indignation threw Myrtilus

into the sea (l. 192, p. 11). In some stories Oenomaüs killed the suitors by spearing them from behind when they passed him.—Pelops was the son of Tantalus, renowned for his pride and its punishment.

P. 3, l. 8, For Helen's sake.]—*i.e.* in order to win Helen back from the Trojans.

P. 4, l. 23, Whatever birth most fair.]—Artemis Kalliste ("Most Fair") was apparently so called because, after a competition for beauty, that which won the prize (τὸ καλλιστεῖον) was selected and given to her. This rite is made by the story to lead to a sacrifice of the fairest maiden, and may very possibly have sometimes done so.

P. 4, l. 42.]—She tells her dream to the sky to get it off her mind, much as the Nurse does in the *Medea* (p. 5, l. 57).

P. 5, l. 50, One . . . pillar.]—It is worth remembering that a pillar was among the earliest objects of worship in Crete and elsewhere. Cf. "the pillared sanctities" (l. 128, p. 9) and the "blood on the pillars" (l. 405, p. 20).

P. 8, l. 113, A hollow one might creep through.]—The metopes, or gaps between the beams. The Temple was therefore of a primitive Dorian type.

P. 8, ll. 124–125.]—The land of Tauris is conceived as being beyond the Symplêgades, or, as here, as being the country of the Symplêgades.

As these semi-mythical names settled down in history, Tauris became the Crimea, the Symplêgades, or "Clashing Rocks," or "Dark-Blue Rocks," became two rocks at the upper end of the Bosphorus, and the Friendless or Strangerless Sea became the Euxine. The word *Axeinos*, "Friendless," has often

been altered in the MSS. of this play to *Euxeinos*, "Hospitable," which was the ordinary prose name of the Black Sea in historical times.

P. 9, l. 133, The horses and the towers.]—The steppes of the Taurians would have no gardens or city walls, but it is curious that Hellas should seem specially a land of horses by comparison. Cf. p. 86, l. 1423, where Thoas has horses.

P. 10, l. 168, The golden goblet, &c.]—She evidently takes jars of libation from the Attendants and pours them during the next few lines into some *Eschara*, or Altar for the Dead. Most of the rite would probably be performed kneeling.

P. 11, ll. 192 ff., The dark and wheeling coursers.]—*i.e.* those of Pelops. The cry of one betrayed: Myrtilus, when he was thrown into the sea. (See on l. 1.) For the Golden Lamb and the Sun turning in Heaven, see my translation of *Electra*, p. 47, ll. 699 and note.

P. 12, l. 217, The Nereid's Son.]—Achilles, son of Peleus and the Nereid Thetis.

P. 13, l. 238, The Herdsman's entrance.]—Observe how Iphigenia is first merely disturbed in her obsequies: then comes the sickening news that there are strangers to sacrifice: then lastly, her worst fear is realised; the men are Greeks. This explains her exasperated tone in ll. 254, "The sea! What is the sea . . ." and "Go back!"—The Herdsman is merely jubilant and obtuse.

P. 15, l. 263.]—The murex or purple-fish could only be collected in very late autumn or early spring; consequently the fishers made encampments for the winter and returned to Tyre and Sidon, or wherever

else they came from, after the spring fishing. See Bérard, *Phéniciens et Odyssée*, i. 415.

P. 15, l. 270, Son of the White Sea Spirit, &c.]—The man is, of course, made to use the names of Greek not of Taurian gods. He thinks first of Palaemon, a sea-god, son of Leucothea ("White-Goddess"), then of the Dioskori, Castor and Polydeuces; then vaguely of some spirits beloved of Nereus, the Ancient of the Sea.

P. 17, l. 328 f., Of all those shots not one struck home.]—The object of this statement must be to explain why the two heroes do not make their appearance bruised and dishevelled as the Second Messenger does after his fight with the Greeks. Of course there is no great harm in making the Taurians bad shots as well as cowards, and possibly there is some value in the suggestion of a supernatural protection which is only saving its object for a crueller death. But very likely the two lines are interpolations.

Pp. 17, 18, ll. 342 ff.]—A wonderful speech, illustrating the gradual breaking-up of the ice in Iphigenia's nature.—The Herdsman's story has, of course, been horrible to her; all the more so because he expects her to enjoy it and recalls wild words she has uttered in the past, when brooding on her wrongs. She controls her feelings absolutely till the man is gone. Then she feels like one turned to stone, pitiless; then, if only it were Helen or Menelaus that she had to kill! Then vivid thoughts of the misery and horror of Aulis and the poor foolish hopes and tremors in which she had come there; then the thought that Orestes, the one man whom she could love without resentment, is dead. Then a rage of indignation

against the bloody rites and the infamy of the thing she has to do. She goes into the Temple broken in nerve and almost ready for rebellion.

P. 19, l. 385 ff.]—Lêtô, beloved of Zeus, was the mother of Artemis and Apollo, who were born in the holy island of Dêlos.—One legend, already rejected by Pindar, said that the crime of Tantalus was that he had given his child Pelops to the gods to eat.

P. 19, l. 392, Dark of the sea.]—The Dark-Blue of the Symplêgades is meant. Sometimes it is only the *Argo* that has ever passed through them; here it is only Io, daughter of Inachus, loved by Zeus and hunted by the gadfly, who fled outcast through the East. Her story is told in Aeschylus' *Prometheus* and in a magnificent chorus of his *Suppliant Women*. (See *Rise of the Greek Epic*, pp. 247 ff.)

The present lyric begins by wondering how and why the strangers have come: then come thoughts of the voyage and places they must have passed; the coast, where Phineus was haunted by the Harpies, the enchanted sea beyond the Symplêgades, and the mysterious Isle of Leuce ("White") where Achilles lives after death.—Then comes a thought of Iphigeniâ's longing for revenge on Helen: but revenge is no use. It is home they crave, or, if that is impossible, then sleep and dreams of home.

P. 21, l. 431, The steering oar abaft.]—The steering was done by an oar, or sometimes two oars, projecting into the sea from a hole in the stern. Cf. l. 1356, p. 83, "And through the stern dragged out the steering-blade." If this oar was left free, it would ripple and beat against the side.

P. 23, l. 472. What mother then was yours, &c.]—

Not very like a woman "turned to stone" or "without a tear." She had miscalculated her own feelings.—Observe how Orestes sternly rejects her sentimental sympathy. He needs all his strength.

P. 25, l. 512, A kind of banishment.]—He was driven by his Furies, not legally banished.

Pp. 26, 27, ll. 515 and 529, "Oh how sweet to see thee here!" and "Oh, give me this hour full. Thou wilt soon die."—Iphigenia is more than tactless. She is so starving for home or anything that brings her into touch with home, that neither this Stranger's death nor anything else matters to her in comparison. A fine dramatic stroke.

The people of whom she asks are, first, her enemies—Helen; Calchas, the prophet, who had commanded her sacrifice; Odysseus, who had devised the plot by which she was brought to Aulis (ll. 16, 24); then Achilles, who had been the hero of her dreams; then, with fear and hesitancy, those for whom she cares most.—Observe, at l. 553, how, on hearing of her father's murder, her first thought is pity for her mother. Her father is already in her mind "he that slew." But in every line of this dialogue there is fine drama and psychology.

P. 28, l. 538, "Small help his bridal brought him; he is dead."—It has been thought curious that the mention of Achilles should immediately suggest to Orestes the bridal at Aulis, though of course it does so to Iphigenia. But after all it was Orestes' sister that Achilles was to marry at Aulis; and secondly, a large part of Orestes' troubles came from the carrying off of his betrothed, Hermione, by Achilles' bastard son, Pyrrhus. If the marriage

at Aulis had taken place and Achilles left a true-born son, that would all have been different.

P. 31, l. 569, Light dreams farewell! Ye too were lies.]—This does seem a wrong conclusion. The dreams only suggested that Orestes had died the day before, long after this man had left Argos. But perhaps it is not unnatural.

P. 32, ll. 576 f., We too have kinsmen dear.]—A most characteristic Euripidean saying. It also leads up to the personal interest in the Chorus which we feel after l. 1075, p. 63, when they are taken into the conspiracy and then abandoned.

P. 32, l. 578, Listen; for I am fallen upon a thought.]—It must not be supposed that this use of the tablet is an obvious or easy thing. It is a daring project that crosses her mind, as one possible way of avoiding the death of this Stranger. Her hesitation at l. 742—where a pause is indicated in the Greek—shows that she is only trusting to her special influence over the King to get him to relax the law. Presumably merchants sometimes were admitted to the Tauri; for instance, those who brought the Chorus. The safe way to use the tablet would have been to make sure of the friendship of one of these. But such questions lie outside the play.

P. 34, l. 618, This altar's spell is over me.]—I translate the MS. reading, $\tau\eta\sigma\delta\epsilon$. In my text I accepted the usual emendation $\tau\eta\nu\delta\epsilon$. But $\pi\rho\sigma\tau\rho\omicron\pi\eta$ means "spell" or "infection." See *Rise of the Greek Epic*, p. 86.

P. 34, l. 627, My sister's hand.]—*i.e.* Electra's.

Pp. 35-39, ll. 645-724.]—Observe that all through this scene it is Pylades who is broken

and Orestes strong. Contrast their first entrance, pp. 6-8.

P. 45, l. 804, Argos is bright with him.]—Literally, "is full of him." I am not sure that I understand the expression, but I think she feels Orestes as a magnificent presence filling all his home.

P. 46, ll. 809 ff.]—The "signs" are clear enough. He remembers that there was an embroidery of the Golden Lamb story worked by Iphigenia; that when she started for Aulis she had cut off her hair for her mother and her mother had given her some Inachus water to use in the sacred washing before her marriage; also there was an old spear belonging to Pelops in Iphigenia's room.—Apparently Pelops carried a spear in the chariot race, just as Oenomaüs did.

Pp. 47-50, ll. 827-900.]—In this scene Iphigenia simply abandons herself to one emotion after another, while Orestes, amid all his joy, keeps his head and thinks about the danger that still surrounds them. When he reminds her that they are "not yet fortunate," she thinks only of Aulis and her old wrong. At last Orestes gets in the word, "Suppose you had murdered me to-day," and she is recalled by a rush of horror at her own conduct: she has nearly killed him, and he is still in imminent danger. She tries passionately and despairingly to think of ways of escape, but it needs the intervention of Pylades (which she rather resents) to bring her into a mood for sober thinking.

P. 51, l. 915, A wife and happy.]—The last we heard of Electra was that she lived "unmated and alone" (l. 562, p. 31). But that was said when Pylades was regarded as practically a dead man.

NOTES

Electra was apparently betrothed to Pylades, but was not actually his wife.—There is no mention of the Peasant husband of the *Electra*.

P. 52, l. 818.]—Anaxibia (?), sister of Agamemnon, was wife to Strophios. See genealogical table.

P. 53, ll. 930 ff., 'That frenzy on the shore!']—It is only now that Iphigenia fully realises her brother's madness. His narrative immediately following makes her feel it the more, and it is evidently in her mind while she speaks ll. 989 ff.

P. 54 f., l. 940 ff., Orestes' Trial at Athens.]—According to one legend Orestes was finally purified of his guilt by a trial at the Areopagus, in which Apollo championed him, and Athena, as President, gave a casting vote for mercy. (This is the story of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*.) By another, he was healed when he had brought this Image of Artemis to Attica. Euripides combines the two.—It must often have happened in a blood-feud that some of the kindred of the slain man would accept the result of a trial and obey the law, while some cared for no law but clung to their vengeance. Euripides makes the Furies do the same. Some accept the judgment and stay as "Eumenides" in Athens; others know no law nor mercy.

P. 55, ll. 949–960, Mine evil days are made a rite among them.]—At the Feast of the Anthesteria, each family summoned its ghosts from the grave and after the feast sent them back again. While they were about, it was very important that each man should keep his ghosts to himself: there must be no infection of strange or baleful ghosts. Hence a rite in which each man ate and drank his own portion,

holding no communication with his neighbour. The story then went that this was done in commemoration of Orestes' visit to Athens with the stain of blood upon him. (See Miss Harrison's *Prolegomena*, chap. ii.) There was a similar feast in Aegina.

P. 56, ll. 990-1006.]—Iphigeniâ's speech. We must realise that Iphigeniâ has been suddenly confronted by a new and complicated difficulty. She was prepared to make some plot to save her brother's life. She now realises that he is on the verge of madness ; that he is determined to commit an act of what will be considered desperate sacrilege by stealing the image of Artemis ; and that he expects her to help him to get the image to his ship.—She might hope to send him away safe and be forgiven by the King : if she helps him to steal the image, she cannot possibly be forgiven. Again, she might very possibly fly with him secretly, if she went alone ; but to steal the statue and fly seems impossible.

Confronted with this problem, she deliberately abandons both her thoughts of vengeance and her hope of escape, and agrees to give her life for Orestes.

P. 59, l. 1029, I think I dimly see.]—Compare *Electra*, translation, p. 42, where Electra suddenly solves the difficulty of slaying Clytemnestra.

P. 63, ll. 1075 ff., Be of good heart, sweet Mistress.]—The women of the Chorus are indeed "true of heart and faithful found," as Athena says later. And one feels that Iphigeniâ, after her first gush of gratitude, does not think of them much. She will save her brother, and they will be left with very little hope of ever seeing Greece, if indeed they are not fatally compromised by their share in the

plot.—One can hardly blame Iphigenia; but it is like her.

P. 64, l. 1089, Bird of the sea rocks.]—A wonderful lyric, as spoken by these exiles waiting on the shore.—In their craving for home the island of Delos becomes the symbol for all that is Greek. Delos, the birth-place of Apollo and of a kinder Artemis than that which they now serve, was the meeting-place of all the Ionians. The palm-tree, the laurel, the olive, and the Orbed Lake of Delos were all celebrated in ritual poetry. The singing Swan is not a myth; it is a migratory swan, with a bell-like cry, which comes in the winter down from South Russia to Greece.

Isle of Pain and Love.]—Literally, “Beloved birth-pang of Leto.” When Leto was about to give birth to her twin children and no land would receive her, the little rock of Delos pitied her and gave her a resting-place.

P. 64, ll. 1106 ff., Ah, the old tears.]—The singer’s mind goes back to her old grief, when her city was taken and she sold as a slave from market to market till she reached Thoas. Then comes the thought of Iphigenia’s happy voyage to Greece and freedom; then a dream-like longing to fly home, to watch the dances where once she danced for the prize of beauty.

P. 67, l. 1156, Iphigenia enters, carrying the Image.]—It would probably be a sort of Palladion—a rough figure with a shield (originally typifying the moon?), not very large. She would probably hold it in a robe of some sort, that her bare hand might not touch a thing so holy. At sight of Thoas she would probably cover it up altogether. It is not quite clear when she puts the image down.

P. 67, l. 1161, I unsay that word.]—It was a bad omen for Thoas to say at so critical a moment that a rule was broken. The priestess declares the word unsaid—just the opposite of “accepting” an omen.—Dr. Verrall, however, suggests to me that the line means, “I ask Hestia (the spirit of Holiness) to take in charge what I am going to say”; *i.e.* all the falsehoods into which she is about to plunge.

This scene of the fooling of Thoas is full of wit and double meanings. The end of it is rather like the famous scene in *Forget-me-not*, where the Corsican avenger is induced to turn his back in order to let a lady pass out of the room without being seen and compromised, the lady in question being really the person whom he has sworn to kill.

P. 72, ll. 1203 ff.]—The change of metre denotes increasing tension of excitement.

Each individual invention of Iphigenia seems clearly to have its purpose. She wants to combine a great appearance of precaution against the escape of the strangers—hence the soldiers, the bonds, &c.—with the greatest possible reality of precaution against any one preventing their escape: hence she takes the soldiers without an officer, the townsfolk are forbidden to follow or even to look, and the King is left at the Temple. The exact motive of all the veiling I do not see; perhaps it adds to the effect to represent Thoas as deliberately hiding his eyes while he is deceived. But in any case her precautions all seem sound according to ancient theology.

P. 77, ll. 1235, 1282, Oh, fair the fruits of Leto blow, &c.]—A curious and rather difficult little ritual hymn explaining how Apollo came from Delos to

Delphi. It acts more as an interlude than anything else, to fill the time until we learn the issue of the attempt at escape.

All Delphi originally belonged to Mother Earth. The oracles were given by her daughter Themis, and the place guarded by an ancient earth-born Dragon. Apollo came, slew the Dragon, and turned Themis away. Earth took revenge upon him in a curious manner : she invented Dreams, which told the future freely, though, it would seem, confusedly, and, so to speak, spoiled the trade of Delphi until Apollo appealed to Zeus for protection.—The story is not very creditable to the gods, and is expressly denied by Aeschylus on that ground. According to him there was never any strife ; Earth, Themis, Phoebê peacefully succeeded one another at Delphi, and Phoebê gave it as a birth-gift to Phoebus or Apollo.

I think the story is probably a case of the infant Sun slaying the Serpent of darkness. The ancient identification of Phoebus Apollo with the sun and Artemis-Hecate with the moon seems to me to withstand all modern criticisms, though of course there are many other elements combined with the Sun and Moon elements.

P. 79, l. 1284, Messenger.]—This excited rush upon the stage of a man clamouring for the King is very clever as a next step in the story. One sees at once the sort of thing that has happened, and wants to know what exactly.

P. 80, l. 1302, "This good messenger."]—There is nothing to tell us what the good messenger is. Probably a large sacred knocker, such as were often on temple doors. (They served for suppliants to

catch hold of as well as for summoning the people inside.) But it may be a gong or a horn hanging by the door, or the like.

P. 82, l. 1325, Aye, tell thy tale.]—It is perhaps a little awkward that Thoas should ask for the whole story before taking any steps to pursue Iphigenia. But partly he is so amazed that he wants to hear all he can before moving; partly, he is represented as being really sure of his prey, as king of all the Taurian seas.

P. 83, l. 1350, The prow was held by stay-poles.]—The ship was afloat, having been just dragged off the shore, bow forwards. The men were raising the anchor, and holding the prow steady by long punt-poles. The ladder seems to have been a rope-ladder; but the Greek is difficult, and I do not know of any mention of a rope-ladder elsewhere in Greek literature.

P. 84, l. 1384, The Maid of Argos and the carven wood of Heaven.]—Observe how closely Iphigenia and the image are united. She appears with it in her arms; she must fly together with it, or die; she and the image enter the ship together. There is religion behind this. Perhaps there was some old statue of the goddess carrying her own image, as Athena sometimes carries a Palladion; when Iphigenia became the priestess and Artemis the goddess, this was interpreted as the priestess carrying the goddess' image.

P. 85, l. 1415, There is One who rules the sea.]—Poseidon, the sea god, was traditionally a friend of Troy. See the first scene of *The Trojan Women*.

P. 86, l. 1435, ATHENA.]—Modern readers com-

plain a good deal of this appearance of the God from the Machine. Some day I hope to discuss the *Deus ex Machina* at length, but in the meantime I would point out the following facts: 1. A theophany or appearance of a god seems to have been in the essence of the original conception of Greek Drama; a study of the fragments of Aeschylus will illustrate this. What Euripides did, apparently, was to invent, or use when invented, an improved kind of stage machinery for introducing the god in the air. 2. The theophany seems to have been effective with the Greek audience, and I believe it would usually be so with any audience that was not highly sophisticated and accustomed to associate such appearances with pantomime fairies. 3. In nearly all cases the god who appears not only speaks lines of great beauty and serenity, but also comes with counsel and comfort which have something of heaven about them. The Dioscori of the *Electra* are most typical, healing the agony of revenge by sheer forgiveness; the beautiful Artemis of the *Hippolytus* is different, but divine also. But every case needs its special treatment.

P. 87, l. 1457, Artemis the Tauropole.]—On the site of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae, see Preface, p. vi. There is a play on words in "Tauropole"; it is interesting to see that Euripides has prepared for it as early as Orestes' first speech, ll. 84 f., though I did not think it worth representing in English there.

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ELECTRA

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CLYTEMNESTRA, *Queen of Argos and Mycenae; widow of Agamemnon.*

ELECTRA, *daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.*

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, now in banishment.*

A PEASANT, *husband of Electra.*

AN OLD MAN, *formerly servant to Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *son of Strophios, King of Phocis; friend to Orestes.*

ÆGISTHUS, *usurping King of Argos and Mycenae, now husband of Clytemnestra.*

The Heroes CASTOR and POLYDEUCES.

CHORUS of Argive Women, with their LEADER.

FOLLOWERS of ORESTES; HANDMAIDS of CLYTEMNESTRA.

The Scene is laid in the mountains of Argos. The play was first produced between the years 414 and 412 B.C.

INTRODUCTION¹

THE *Electra* of Euripides has the distinction of being, perhaps, the best abused, and, one might add, not the best understood, of ancient tragedies. "A singular monument of poetical, or rather unpoetical perversity;" "the very worst of all his pieces;" are, for instance, the phrases applied to it by Schlegel. Considering that he judged it by the standards of conventional classicism, he could scarcely have arrived at any different conclusion. For it is essentially, and perhaps consciously, a protest against those standards. So, indeed, is the tragedy of *The Trojan Women*; but on very different lines. The *Electra* has none of the imaginative splendour, the vastness, the intense poetry, of that wonderful work. It is a close-knit, powerful, well-constructed play, as realistic as the tragic conventions will allow, intellectual and rebellious. Its psychology reminds one of Browning, or even of Ibsen.

To a fifth-century Greek all history came in the form of legend; and no less than three extant tragedies, Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* (456 B.C.), Euripides' *Electra* (413 B.C.), and Sophocles' *Electra* (date unknown: but perhaps the latest of the three) are based on the particular piece of legend or history now before us. It narrates how the son and daughter

¹ Most of this introduction is reprinted, by the kind permission of the Editors, from an article in the *Independent Review*, vol. i. No. 4.

of the murdered king, Agamemnon, slew, in due course of revenge, and by Apollo's express command, their guilty mother and her paramour.

Homer had long since told the story, as he tells so many, simply and grandly, without moral questioning and without intensity. The atmosphere is heroic. It is all a blood-feud between chieftains, in which Orestes, after seven years, succeeds in slaying his foe Aegisthus, who had killed his father. He probably killed his mother also ; but we are not directly told so. His sister may have helped him, and he may possibly have gone mad afterwards ; but these painful issues are kept determinedly in the shade.

Somewhat surprisingly, Sophocles, although by his time Electra and Clytemnestra had become leading figures in the story and the mother-murder its essential climax, preserves a very similar atmosphere. His tragedy is enthusiastically praised by Schlegel for "the celestial purity, the fresh breath of life and youth, that is diffused over so dreadful a subject." "Everything dark and ominous is avoided. Orestes enjoys the fulness of health and strength. He is beset neither with doubts nor stings of conscience." Especially laudable is the "austerity" with which Aegisthus is driven into the house to receive, according to Schlegel, a specially ignominious death !

This combination of matricide and good spirits, however satisfactory to the determined classicist, will probably strike most intelligent readers as a little curious, and even, if one may use the word at all in connection with so powerful a play, undramatic. It

becomes intelligible as soon as we observe that Sophocles was deliberately seeking what he regarded as an archaic or "Homeric" style (cf. Jebb, *Introd.* p. xli.); and this archaism, in its turn, seems to me best explained as a conscious reaction against Euripides' searching and unconventional treatment of the same subject (cf. Wilamowitz in *Hermes*, xviii. pp. 214 ff.). In the result Sophocles is not only more "classical" than Euripides; he is more primitive by far than Aeschylus.

For Aeschylus, though steeped in the glory of the world of legend, would not lightly accept its judgment upon religious and moral questions, and above all would not, in that region, play at make-believe. He would not elude the horror of this story by simply not mentioning it, like Homer, or by pretending that an evil act was a good one, like Sophocles. He faces the horror; realises it; and tries to surmount it on the sweep of a great wave of religious emotion. The mother-murder, even if done by a god's command, is a sin; a sin to be expiated by unfathomable suffering. Yet, since the god cannot have commanded evil, it is a duty also. It is a sin that *must* be committed.

Euripides, here as often, represents intellectually the thought of Aeschylus carried a step further. He faced the problem just as Aeschylus did, and as Sophocles did not. But the solution offered by Aeschylus did not satisfy him. It cannot, in its actual details, satisfy any one. To him the mother-murder—like most acts of revenge, but more than most—was a sin and a horror. Therefore it should

not have been committed ; and the god who enjoined it *did* command evil, as he had done in a hundred other cases ! He is no god of light ; he is only a demon of old superstition, acting, among other influences, upon a sore-beset man, and driving him towards a miscalled duty, the horror of which, when done, will unseat his reason.

But another problem interests Euripides even more than this. What kind of man was it—above all, what kind of woman can it have been, who would do this deed of mother-murder, not in sudden fury but deliberately, as an act of “justice,” after many years ? A “sympathetic” hero and heroine are out of the question ; and Euripides does not deal in stage villains. He seeks real people. And few attentive readers of this play can doubt that he has found them.

The son is an exile, bred in the desperate hopes and wild schemes of exile ; he is a prince without a kingdom, always dreaming of his wrongs and his restoration ; and driven by the old savage doctrine, which an oracle has confirmed, of the duty and manliness of revenge. He is, as was shown by his later history, a man subject to overpowering impulses and to fits of will-less brooding. Lastly, he is very young, and is swept away by his sister’s intenser nature.

That sister is the central figure of the tragedy. A woman shattered in childhood by the shock of an experience too terrible for a girl to bear ; a poisoned and a haunted woman, eating her heart in ceaseless broodings of hate and love, alike unsatisfied—hate

against her mother and stepfather, love for her dead father and her brother in exile ; a woman who has known luxury and state, and cares much for them ; who is intolerant of poverty, and who feels her youth passing away. And meantime there is her name, on which all legend, if I am not mistaken, insists ; she is *A-lektra*, "the Unmated."

There is, perhaps, no woman's character in the range of Greek tragedy so profoundly studied. Not Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, not Phaedra nor Medea. One's thoughts can only wander towards two great heroines of "lost" plays, Althaea in the *Meleager*, and Stheneboea in the *Bellerophon*.

G. M.

ELECTRA

The scene represents a hut on a desolate mountain side ; the river Inachus is visible in the distance. The time is the dusk of early dawn, before sunrise. The PEASANT is discovered in front of the hut.

PEASANT.

Old gleam on the face of the world, I give thee
hail,

River of Argos land, where sail on sail
The long ships met, a thousand, near and far,
When Agamemnon walked the seas in war ;
Who smote King Priam in the dust, and burned
The storied streets of Ilion, and returned
Above all conquerors, heaping tower and fane
Of Argos high with spoils of Eastern slain.

So in far lands he prospered ; and at home
His own wife trapped and slew him. 'Twas the doom
Aegisthus wrought, son of his father's foe.

Gone is that King, and the old spear laid low
That Tantalus wielded when the world was young.
Aegisthus hath his queen, and reigns among
His people. And the children here alone,
Orestes and Electra, buds unblown

Of man and womanhood, when forth to Troy
He shook his sail and left them—lo, the boy
Orestes, ere Aegisthus' hand could fall,
Was stolen from Argos—borne by one old thrall,
Who served his father's boyhood, over seas
Far off, and laid upon King Strophios' knees
In Phocis, for the old king's sake. But here
The maid Electra waited, year by year,
Alone, till the warm days of womanhood
Drew nigh and suitors came of gentle blood
In Hellas. Then Aegisthus was in fear
Lest she be wed in some great house, and bear
A son to avenge her father. Close he wrought
Her prison in his house, and gave her not
To any wooer. Then, since even this
Was full of peril, and the secret kiss
Of some bold prince might find her yet, and rend
Her prison walls, Aegisthus at the end
Would slay her. Then her mother, she so wild
Aforetime, pled with him and saved her child.
Her heart had still an answer for her lord
Murdered, but if the child's blood spoke, what word
Could meet the hate thereof? After that day
Aegisthus thus decreed : whoso should slay
The old king's wandering son, should win rich
meed

Of gold ; and for Electra, she must wed
With me, not base of blood—in that I stand
True Mycenaean—but in gold and land
Most poor, which maketh highest birth as naught.
So from a powerless husband shall be wrought
A powerless peril. Had some man of might
Possessed her, he had called perchance to light

Her father's blood, and unknown vengeance
Risen on Aegisthus yet.

Aye, mine she is :
But never yet these arms—the Cyprian knows
My truth !—have clasped her body, and she goes
A virgin still. Myself would hold it shame
To abase this daughter of a royal name.
I am too lowly to love violence. Yea,
Orestes too doth move me, far away,
Mine unknown brother ! Will he ever now
Come back and see his sister bowed so low ?

Doth any deem me fool, to hold a fair
Maid in my room and seek no joy, but spare
Her maidenhood ? If any such there be,
Let him but look within. The fool is he
In gentle things, weighing the more and less
Of love by his own heart's untenderness.

[As he ceases ELECTRA comes out of the hut. She is in mourning garb, and carries a large pitcher on her head. She speaks without observing the PEASANT's presence.]

ELECTRA.

Dark shepherdess of many a golden star,
Dost see me, Mother Night ? And how this jar
Hath worn my earth-bowed head, as forth and fro
For water to the hillward springs I go ?
Not for mere stress of need, but purpose set,
That never day nor night God may forget
Aegisthus' sin : aye, and perchance a cry
Cast forth to the waste shining of the sky

May find my father's ear. . . . The woman bred
 Of Tyndareus, my mother—on her head
 Be curses!—from my house hath outcast me;
 She hath borne children to our enemy;
 She hath made me naught, she hath made Orestes
 naught. . . .

[*As the bitterness of her tone increases, the*
 PEASANT comes forward.

PEASANT.

What wouldst thou now, my sad one, ever fraught
 With toil to lighten my toil? And so soft
 Thy nurture was! Have I not chid thee oft,
 And thou wilt cease not, serving without end?

ELECTRA (*turning to him with impulsive affection*).

O friend, my friend, as God might be my friend,
 Thou only hast not trampled on my tears.
 Life scarce can be so hard, 'mid many fears
 And many shames, when mortal heart can find
 Somewhere one healing touch, as my sick mind
 Finds thee. . . . And should I wait thy word, to
 endure

A little for thine easing, yea, or pour
 My strength out in thy toiling fellowship?
 Thou hast enough with fields and kine to keep;
 'Tis mine to make all bright within the door.
 'Tis joy to him that toils, when toil is o'er,
 To find home waiting, full of happy things.

PEASANT.

If so it please thee, go thy way. The springs
Are not far off. And I before the morn
Must drive my team afield, and sow the corn
In the hollows.—Not a thousand prayers can gain
A man's bare bread, save an he work amain.

[ELECTRA and the PEASANT depart on their several
ways. After a few moments there enter
stealthily two armed men, ORESTES and
PYLADES.]

ORESTES.

Thou art the first that I have known in deed
True and my friend, and shelterer of my need.
Thou only, Pylades, of all that knew,
Hast held Orestes of some worth, all through
These years of helplessness, wherein I lie
Downtrodden by the murderer—yea, and by
The murderess, my mother! . . . I am come,
Fresh from the cleansing of Apollo, home
To Argos—and my coming no man yet
Knoweth—to pay the bloody twain their debt
Of blood. This very night I crept alone
To my dead father's grave, and poured thereon
My heart's first tears and tresses of my head
New-shorn, and o'er the barrow of the dead
Slew a black lamb, unknown of them that reign
In this unhappy land. . . . I am not fain
To pass the city gates, but hold me here
Hard on the borders. So my road is clear

To fly if men look close and watch my way ;
 If not, to seek my sister. For men say
 She dwelleth in these hills, no more a maid
 But wedded. I must find her house, for aid
 To guide our work, and learn what hath betid
 Of late in Argos.—Ha, the radiant lid
 Of Dawn's eye lifteth ! Come, friend ; leave we now
 This trodden path. Some worker of the plough,
 Or serving damsel at her early task
 Will presently come by, whom we may ask
 If here my sister dwells. But soft ! Even now
 I see some bondmaid there, her death-shorn brow
 Bending beneath its freight of well-water.
 Lie close until she pass ; then question her.
 A slave might help us well, or speak some sign
 Of import to this work of mine and thine.

[*The two men retire into ambush.* ELECTRA
enters, returning from the well.

ELECTRA.

Onward, O labouring tread,
 As on move the years ;
 Onward amid thy tears,
 O happier dead !

Let me remember. I am she, [Strophe 1.
 Agamemnon's child, and the mother of me
 Clytemnestra, the evil Queen,
 Helen's sister. And folk, I ween,
 That pass in the streets call yet my name
 Electra. . . . God protect my shame !

For toil, toil is a weary thing,
And life is heavy about my head ;
And thou' far off, O Father and King,
In the lost lands of the dead.
A bloody twain made these things be ;
One was thy bitterest enemy,
And one the wife that lay by thee.

Brother, brother, on some far shore [*Antistrophe* 1.
Hast thou a city, is there a door
That knows thy footfall, Wandering One ?
Who left me, left me, when all our pain
Was bitter about us, a father slain,
And a girl that wept in her room alone.

Thou couldst break me this bondage sore,
Only thou, who art far away,
Loose our father, and wake once more. . . .
Zeus, Zeus, dost hear me pray ? . . .
The sleeping blood and the shame and the doom !
O feet that rest not, over the foam
Of distant seas, come home, come home !

What boots this cruse that I carry ? [*Strophe* 2.
O, set free my brow !

For the gathered tears that tarry
Through the day and the dark till now,
Now in the dawn are free,
Father, and flow beneath
The floor of the world, to be
As a song in the house of Death :
From the rising up of the day
They guide my heart alway,
The silent tears unshed,
And my body mourns for the dead ;

My cheeks bleed silently,
 And these bruised temples keep
 Their pain, remembering thee
 And thy bloody sleep.

Be rent, O hair of mine head !

As a swan crying alone
 Where the river windeth cold,
 For a loved, for a silent one,
 Whom the toils of the fowler hold,
 I cry, Father, to thee,
 O slain in misery !

The water, the wan water, [Antistrophe 2
 Lapped him, and his head
 Drooped in the bed of slaughter
 Low, as one wearied ;
 Woe for the edgèd axe,
 And woe for the heart of hate,
 Houndlike about thy tracks,
 O conqueror desolate,
 From Troy over land and sea,
 Till a wife stood waiting thee ;
 Not with crowns did she stand,
 Nor flowers of peace in her hand ;
 With Aegisthus' dagger drawn
 For her hire she strove,
 Through shame and through blood alone ;
 And won her a traitor's love.

[As she ceases there enter from right and
 left the CHORUS, consisting of women of
 Argos, young and old, in festal dress.

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Child of the mighty dead, [Strophe.
Electra, lo, my way
To thee in the dawn hath sped,
And the cot on the mountain grey,
For the Watcher hath cried this day :
He of the ancient folk,
The walker of waste and hill,
Who drinketh the milk of the flock ;
And he told of Hera's will ;
For the morrow's morrow now
They cry her festival,
And before her throne shall bow
Our damsels all.

ELECTRA.

Not unto joy, nor sweet
Music, nor shining of gold,
The wings of my spirit beat.
Let the brides of Argos hold
Their dance in the night, as of old ;
I lead no dance ; I mark
No beat as the dancers sway ;
With tears I dwell in the dark,
And my thought is of tears alway,
To the going down of the day.
Look on my wasted hair
And raiment. . . . This that I bear,

Is it meet for the King my sire,
 And her whom the King begot?
 For Troy, that was burned with fire
 And forgetteth not?

CHORUS.

Other Women.

Hera is great!—Ah, come, [*Antistrophe.*
 Be kind; and my hand shall bring
 Fair raiment, work of the loom,
 And many a golden thing,
 For joyous robe-wearing.
 Deemest thou this thy woe
 Shall rise unto God as prayer,
 Or bend thine haters low?
 Doth God for thy pain have care?
 Not tears for the dead nor sighs,
 But worship and joy divine
 Shall win thee peace in thy skies,
 O daughter mine!

ELECTRA.

No care cometh to God
 For the voice of the helpless; none
 For the crying of ancient blood.
 Alas for him that is gone,
 And for thee, O wandering one:
 That now, methinks, in a land
 Of the stranger must toil for hire,
 And stand where the poor men stand,
 A-cold by another's fire,
 O son of the mighty sire:

While I in a beggar's cot
On the wrecked hills, changing not,
Starve in my soul for food ;
 But our mother lieth wed
In another's arms, and blood
 Is about her bed.

LEADER.

On all of Greece she wrought great jeopardy,
Thy mother's sister, Helen,—and on thee.

[ORESTES and PYLADES move out from their concealment ; ORESTES comes forward : PYLADES beckons to two ARMED SERVANTS and stays with them in the background.]

ELECTRA.

Woe's me ! No more of wailing ! Women, flee !
Strange armed men beside the dwelling there
Lie ambushed ! They are rising from their lair.
Back by the road, all you. I will essay
The house ; and may our good feet save us !

ORESTES (*between ELECTRA and the hut*).

Stay,
Unhappy woman ! Never fear my steel.

ELECTRA (*in utter panic*).

O bright Apollo ! Mercy ! See, I kneel ;
Slay me not.

EURIPIDES

ORESTES.

Others I have yet to slay
Less dear than thou.

ELECTRA.

Go from me ! Wouldst thou lay
Hand on a body that is not for thee ?

ORESTES.

None is there I would touch more righteously.

ELECTRA.

Why lurk'st thou by my house ? And why a sword ?

ORESTES.

Stay. Listen ! Thou wilt not gainsay my word.

ELECTRA.

There—I am still. Do what thou wilt with me.
Thou art too strong.

ORESTES.

A word I bear to thee . . .
Word of thy brother.

ELECTRA.

Oh, friend ! More than friend !
Living or dead ?

ORESTES.

He lives ; so let me send
My comfort foremost, ere the rest be heard.

ELECTRA.

God love thee for the sweetness of thy word !

ORESTES.

God love the twain of us, both thee and me.

ELECTRA.

He lives ! Poor brother ! In what land weareth he
His exile ?

ORESTES.

Not one region nor one lot
His wasted life hath trod.

ELECTRA.

He lacketh not
For bread ?

ORESTES.

Bread hath he ; but a man is weak
In exile.

ELECTRA.

What charge laid he on thee ? Speak.

ORESTES.

To learn if thou still live, and how the storm,
Living, hath struck thee.

ELECTRA.

That thou seest ; this form
Wasted . . .

ORESTES.

Yea, riven with the fire of woe.
I sigh to look on thee.

ELECTRA.

My face ; and, lo,
My temples of their ancient glory shorn.

ORESTES.

Methinks thy brother haunts thee, being forlorn ;
Aye, and perchance thy father, whom they slew. . .

ELECTRA.

What should be nearer to me than those two ?

ORESTES.

And what to him, thy brother, half so dear
As thou ?

ELECTRA.

His is a distant love, not near
At need.

ORESTES.

But why this dwelling place, this life
Of loneliness ?

ELECTRA (*with sudden bitterness*).

Stranger, I am a wife. . . .
O better dead !

ORESTES.

That seals thy brother's doom !
What Prince of Argos . . . ?

ELECTRA.

Not the man to whom
My father thought to give me.

ORESTES.

Speak ; that I
May tell thy brother all.

ELECTRA.

'Tis there, hard by,
His dwelling, where I live, far from men's eyes.

ORESTES.

Some ditcher's cot, or cowherd's, by its guise !

ELECTRA (*struck with shame for her ingratitude*).

A poor man ; but true-hearted, and to me
God-fearing.

ORESTES.

How ? What fear of God hath he ?

ELECTRA.

He hath never held my body to his own.

ORESTES.

Hath he some vow to keep ? Or is it done
To scorn thee ?

ELECTRA.

Nay ; he only scorns to sin
Against my father's greatness.

ORESTES.

But to win
A princess ! Doth his heart not leap for pride ?

ELECTRA.

He honoureth not the hand that gave the bride.

ORESTES.

I see. He trembles for Orestes' wrath ?

ELECTRA.

Aye, that would move him. But beside, he hath
A gentle heart.

ORESTES.

Strange ! A good man. . . . I swear
He well shall be requited.

ELECTRA.

Whensoever
Our wanderer comes again !

ORESTES.

Thy mother stays
Unmoved 'mid all thy wrong ?

ELECTRA.

A lover weighs
More than a child in any woman's heart.

ORESTES.

But what end seeks Aegisthus, by such art
Of shame ?

ELECTRA.

To make mine unborn children low
And weak, even as my husband.

ORESTES.

Lest there grow
From thee the avenger ?

ELECTRA.

Such his purpose is :
For which may I requite him !

ORESTES.

And of this
Thy virgin life—Aegisthus knows it ?

ELECTRA.

Nay,
We speak it not. It cometh not his way.

ORESTES.

These women hear us. Are they friends to thee ?

ELECTRA.

Aye, friends and true. They will keep faithfully
All words of mine and thine.

ORESTES (*trying her*).

Thou art well stayed
With friends. And could Orestes give thee aid
In aught, if e'er . . .

ELECTRA.

Shame on thee ! Seest thou not ?
Is it not time ?

ORESTES (*catching her excitement*).

How time ? And if he sought
To slay, how should he come at his desire ?

ELECTRA.

By daring, as they dared who slew his sire !

ORESTES.

Wouldst thou dare with him, if he came, thou too,
To slay her ?

ELECTRA.

Yes ; with the same axe that slew
My father !

ORESTES.

'Tis thy message ? And thy mood
Unchanging ?

ELECTRA.

Let me shed my mother's blood,
And I die happy.

ORESTES.

God ! . . . I would that now
Orestes heard thee here.

ELECTRA.

Yet, wottest thou,
Though here I saw him, I should know him not.

ORESTES.

Surely. Ye both were children, when they wrought
Your parting.

ELECTRA.

One alone in all this land
Would know his face.

ORESTES.

The thrall, methinks, whose hand
Stole him from death—or so the story ran ?

ELECTRA.

He taught my father, too, an old old man
Of other days than these.

ORESTES.

Thy father's grave . . .
He had due rites and tendance ?

ELECTRA.

What chance gave,
My father had, cast out to rot in the sun.

ORESTES.

God, 'tis too much ! . . . To hear of such things done
Even to a stranger, stings a man. . . . But speak,
Tell of thy life, that I may know, and seek
Thy brother with a tale that must be heard
Howe'er it sicken. If mine eyes be blurred,
Remember, 'tis the fool that feels not. Aye,
Wisdom is full of pity ; and thereby
Men pay for too much wisdom with much pain.

LEADER.

My heart is moved as this man's. I would fain
Learn all thy tale. Here dwelling on the hills
Little I know of Argos and its ills.

ELECTRA.

If I must speak—and at love's call, God knows,
I fear not—I will tell thee all ; my woes,
My father's woes, and—O, since thou hast stirred
This storm of speech, thou bear him this my word—
His woes and shame ! Tell of this narrow cloak
In the wind ; this grime and reek of toil, that choke
My breathing ; this low roof that bows my head
After a king's. This raiment . . . thread by thread,
'Tis I must weave it, or go bare—must bring,
Myself, each jar of water from the spring.
No holy day for me, no festival,
No dance upon the green ! From all, from all
I am cut off. No portion hath my life
'Mid wives of Argos, being no true wife.
No portion where the maidens throng to praise
Castor—my Castor, whom in ancient days,

Ere he passed from us and men worshipped him,
They named my bridegroom!—

And she, she! . . . The grim
Troy spoils gleam round her throne, and by each
hand

Queens of the East, my father's prisoners, stand,
A cloud of Orient webs and tangling gold.
And there upon the floor, the blood, the old
Black blood, yet crawls and cankers, like a rot
In the stone! And on our father's chariot
The murderer's foot stands glorying, and the red
False hand uplifts that ancient staff, that led
The armies of the world! . . . Aye, tell him how
The grave of Agamemnon, even now,
Lacketh the common honour of the dead;
A desert barrow, where no tears are shed,
No tresses hung, no gift, no myrtle spray.
And when the wine is in him, so men say,
Our mother's mighty master leaps thereon,
Spurning the slab, or pelteth stone on stone,
Flouting the lone dead and the twain that live:
"Where is thy son Orestes? Doth he give
Thy tomb good tendance? Or is all forgot?"
So is he scorned because he cometh not. . . .

O Stranger, on my knees, I charge thee, tell
This tale, not mine, but of dumb wrongs that swell
Crowding—and I the trumpet of their pain,
This tongue, these arms, this bitter burning brain;
These dead shorn locks, and he for whom they
died!

His father slew Troy's thousands in their pride:
He hath but one to kill. . . . O God, but one!
Is he a man, and Agamemnon's son?

LEADER.

But hold : is this thy husband from the plain,
His labour ended, hasting home again ?

Enter the PEASANT.

PEASANT.

Ha, who be these ? Strange men in arms before
My house ! What would they at this lonely door ?
Seek they for me ?—Strange gallants should not stay
A woman's goings.

ELECTRA.

Friend and helper !—Nay,
Think not of any evil. These men be
Friends of Orestes, charged with words for me ! . . .
Strangers, forgive his speech.

PEASANT.

What word have they
Of him ? At least he lives and sees the day ?

ELECTRA.

So fares their tale—and sure I doubt it not !

PEASANT.

And ye two still are living in his thought,
Thou and his father ?

ELECTRA.

In his dreams we live.
An exile hath small power.

PEASANT.

And did he give
Some privy message ?

ELECTRA.

None : they come as spies
For news of me.

PEASANT.

Thine outward news their eyes
Can see ; the rest, methinks, thyself will tell.

ELECTRA.

They have seen all, heard all. I trust them well.

PEASANT.

Why were our doors not open long ago ?—
Be welcome, strangers both, and pass below
My lintel. In return for your glad words
Be sure all greeting that mine house affords
Is yours.—Ye followers, bear in their gear !—
Gainsay me not ; for his sake are ye dear
That sent you to our house ; and though my part
In life be low, I am no churl at heart.

[*The PEASANT goes to the ARMED SERVANTS at
the back, to help them with the baggage.*

ORESTES (*aside to ELECTRA*).

Is this the man that shields thy maidenhood
Unknown, and will not wrong thy father's blood ?

ELECTRA.

He is called my husband. 'Tis for him I toil.

ORESTES.

How dark lies honour hid ! And what turmoil
In all things human : sons of mighty men
Fallen to naught, and from ill seed again
Good fruit : yea, famine in the rich man's scroll
Writ deep, and in poor flesh a lordly soul.
As, lo, this man, not great in Argos, not
With pride of house uplifted, in a lot
Of unmarked life hath shown a prince's grace.

[*To the PEASANT, who has returned.*

All that is here of Agamemnon's race,
And all that lacketh yet, for whom we come,
Do thank thee, and the welcome of thy home
Accept with gladness.—Ho, men ; hasten ye
Within ! —This open-hearted poverty
Is blither to my sense than feasts of gold.

Lady, thine husband's welcome makes me bold ;
Yet would thou hadst thy brother, before all
Confessed, to greet us in a prince's hall !
Which may be, even yet. Apollo spake
The word ; and surely, though small store I make
Of man's divining, God will fail us not.

[*ORESTES and PYLADES go in, following the*
SERVANTS.

LEADER.

O never was the heart of hope so hot
Within me. How ? So moveless in time past,
Hath Fortune girded up her loins at last ?

ELECTRA.

Now know'st thou not thine own ill furniture,
To bid these strangers in, to whom for sure
Our best were hardship, men of gentle breed ?

PEASANT.

Nay, if the men be gentle, as indeed
I deem them, they will take good cheer or ill
With even kindness.

ELECTRA.

'Twas ill done ; but still—
Go, since so poor thou art, to that old friend
Who reared my father. At the realm's last end
He dwells, where Tanaos river foams between
Argos and Sparta. Long time hath he been
An exile 'mid his flocks. Tell him what thing
Hath chanced on me, and bid him haste and bring
Meat for the strangers' tending.—Glad, I trow,
That old man's heart will be, and many a vow
Will lift to God, to learn the child he stole
From death, yet breathes.—I will not ask a dole
From home ; how should my mother help me ? Nay,
I pity him that seeks that door, to say
Orestes liveth !

PEASANT.

Wilt thou have it so ?
I will take word to the old man. But go
Quickly within, and whatso there thou find
Set out for them. A woman, if her mind
So turn, can light on many a pleasant thing
To fill her board. And surely plenishing
We have for this one day.—'Tis in such shifts

As these, I care for riches, to make gifts
 To friends, or lead a sick man back to health
 With ease and plenty. Else small aid is wealth
 For daily gladness ; once a man be done
 With hunger, rich and poor are all as one.

[*The PEASANT goes off to the left ; ELECTRA goes
 into the house.*

CHORUS.

O for the ships of Troy, the beat [*Strophe 1.*
 Of oars that shimmered
 Innumerable, and dancing feet
 Of Nereids glimmered ;
 And dolphins, drunken with the lyre,
 Across the dark blue prows, like fire,
 Did bound and quiver,
 To cleave the way for Thetis' son,
 Fleet-in-the-wind Achilles, on
 To war, to war, till Troy be won
 Beside the reedy river.

Up from Eubœa's caverns came [*Antistrophe 1.*
 The Nereids, bearing
 Gold armour from the Lords of Flame,
 Wrought for his wearing :
 Long sought those daughters of the deep,
 Up Pelion's glen, up Ossa's steep
 Forest enchanted,
 Where Peleus reared alone, afar,
 His lost sea-maiden's child, the star
 Of Hellas, and swift help of war
 When weary armies panted.

There came a man from Troy, and told [Strophe 2.

Here in the haven,
How, orb on orb, to strike with cold
The Trojan, o'er that targe of gold,
Dread shapes were graven.
All round the level rim thereof
Perseus, on wingèd feet, above
The long seas hied him ;
The Gorgon's wild and bleeding hair
He lifted ; and a herald fair,
He of the wilds, whom Maia bare,
God's Hermes, flew beside him.

[Antistrophe 2.

But midmost, where the boss rose higher,
A sun stood blazing,
And wingèd steeds, and stars in choir,
Hyad and Pleiad, fire on fire,
For Hector's dazing :
Across the golden helm, each way,
Two taloned Sphinxes held their prey,
Song-drawn to slaughter :
And round the breastplate ramping came
A mingled breed of lion and flame,
Hot-eyed to tear that steed of fame
That found Pirênê's water.

The red red sword with steeds four-yoked [Epode.
Black-maned, was graven,
That laboured, and the hot dust smoked
Cloudwise to heaven.

Thou Tyndarid woman ! Fair and tall
 Those warriors were, and o'er them all
 One king great-hearted,
 Whom thou and thy false love did slay :
 Therefore the tribes of Heaven one day
 For these thy dead shall send on thee
 An iron death : yea, men shall see
 The white throat drawn, and blood's red spray,
 And lips in terror parted.

*[As they cease, there enters from the left a very
 old man, bearing a lamb, a wineskin, and
 a wallet.]*

OLD MAN.

Where is my little Princess ? Ah, not now ;
 But still my queen, who tended long ago
 The lad that was her father. . . . How steep-set
 These last steps to her porch ! But faint not yet :
 Onward, ye failing knees and back with pain
 Bowed, till we look on that dear face again.

[Enter ELECTRA.]

Ah, daughter, is it thou ?—Lo, here I am,
 With gifts from all my store ; this suckling lamb
 Fresh from the ewe, green crowns for joyfulness,
 And creamy things new-curdled from the press.
 And this long-stored juice of vintages
 Forgotten, cased in fragrance : scant it is,
 But passing sweet to mingle nectar-wise
 With feebler wine.—Go, bear them in ; mine eyes . . .
 Where is my cloak ?—They are all blurred with
 tears.

ELECTRA.

What ails thine eyes, old friend? After these years
 Doth my low plight still stir thy memories?
 Or think'st thou of Orestes, where he lies
 In exile, and my father? Aye, long love
 Thou gavest him, and seest the fruit thereof
 Wasted, for thee and all who love thee!

OLD MAN.

All

Wasted! And yet 'tis that lost hope withal
 I cannot brook. But now I turned aside
 To see my master's grave. All, far and wide,
 Was silence; so I bent these knees of mine
 And wept and poured drink-offerings from the wine
 I bear the strangers, and about the stone
 Laid myrtle sprays. And, child, I saw thereon
 Just at the censer slain, a fleecèd ewe,
 Deep black, in sacrifice: the blood was new
 About it: and a tress of bright brown hair
 Shorn as in mourning, close. Long stood I there
 And wondered, of all men what man had gone
 In mourning to that grave.—My child, 'tis none
 In Argos. Did there come . . . Nay, mark me
 now . . .

Thy brother in the dark, last night, to bow
 His head before that unadorèd tomb?

O come, and mark the colour of it. Come
 And lay thine own hair by that mourner's tress!
 A hundred little things make likenesses
 In brethren born, and show the father's blood.

ELECTRA (*trying to mask her excitement and resist the contagion of his*).

Old heart, old heart, is this a wise man's mood? . . .
 O, not in darkness, not in fear of men,
 Shall Argos find him, when he comes again,
 Mine own undaunted . . . Nay, and if it were,
 What likeness could there be? My brother's hair
 Is as a prince's and a rover's, strong
 With sunlight and with strife: not like the long
 Locks that a woman combs. . . . And many a head
 Hath this same semblance, wing for wing, tho' bred
 Of blood not ours. . . . 'Tis hopeless. Peace, old
 man.

OLD MAN.

The footprints! Set thy foot by his, and scan
 The track of frame and muscles, how they fit!

ELECTRA.

That ground will take no footprint! All of it
 Is bitter stone. . . . It hath? . . . And who hath
 said

There should be likeness in a brother's tread
 And sister's? His is stronger every way.

OLD MAN.

But hast thou nothing . . . ? If he came this day
 And sought to show thee, is there no one sign
 Whereby to know him? . . . Stay; the robe was
 thine,

Work of thy loom, wherein I wrapt him o'er
 That night, and stole him through the murderers' door.

ELECTRA.

Thou knowest, when Orestes was cast out
I was a child. . . . If I did weave some clout
Of raiment, would he keep the vesture now
He wore in childhood? Should my weaving grow
As his limbs grew? . . . 'Tis lost long since. No
more!

O, either 'twas some stranger passed, and shore
His locks for very ruth before that tomb:
Or, if he found perchance, to seek his home,
Some spy . . .

OLD MAN.

The strangers! Where are they? I fain
Would see them, aye, and bid them answer plain . . .

ELECTRA.

Here at the door! How swift upon the thought!

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.

OLD MAN.

High-born: albeit for that I trust them not.
The highest oft are false. . . . Howe'er it be,
[Approaching them.
I bid the strangers hail!

ORESTES.

All hail to thee,
Greybeard!—Prithee, what man of all the King
Trusted of old, is now this broken thing?

ELECTRA.

'Tis he that trained my father's boyhood.

ORESTES.

How ?

And stole from death thy brother ? Sayest thou ?

ELECTRA.

This man was his deliverer, if it be
Deliverance.

ORESTES.

How his old eye pierceth me,
As one that testeth silver and alloy !
Sees he some likeness here ?

ELECTRA.

Perchance 'tis joy,
To see Orestes' comrade, that he feels.

ORESTES.

None dearer.—But what ails the man ? He reels
Dizzily back.

ELECTRA.

I marvel. I can say
No more.

OLD MAN (*in a broken voice*).

Electra, mistress, daughter, pray !
Pray unto God !

ELECTRA.

Of all things I crave,
The thousand things, or all that others have,
What should I pray for ?

OLD MAN.

Pray thine arms may hold

At last this treasure-dream of more than gold
God shows us !

ELECTRA.

God, I pray thee ! . . . Wouldst thou more ?

OLD MAN.

Gaze now upon this man, and bow before
Thy dearest upon earth !

ELECTRA.

I gaze on thee !

O, hath time made thee mad ?

OLD MAN.

Mad, that I see

Thy brother ?

ELECTRA.

My . . . I know not what thou say'st :

I looked not for it . . .

OLD MAN.

I tell thee, here confessed

Standeth Orestes, Agamemnon's son !

ELECTRA.

A sign before I trust thee ! O, but one !

How dost thou know . . . ?

OLD MAN.

There, by his brow, I see
The scar he made, that day he ran with thee
Chasing thy fawn, and fell.

ELECTRA (*in a dull voice*).

A scar? 'Tis so.

I see a scar.

OLD MAN.

And fearest still to throw
Thine arms round him thou lovest?

ELECTRA.

O, no more!
Thy sign hath conquered me. . . . (*throwing herself*
into ORESTES' arms). At last, at last!
Thy face like light! And do I hold thee fast,
Unhoped for?

ORESTES.

Yea, at last! And I hold thee.

ELECTRA.

I never knew . . .

ORESTES.

I dreamed not.

ELECTRA.

Is it he,

Orestes?

ORESTES.

Thy defender, yea, alone
To fight the world ! Lo, this day have I thrown
A net, which once unbroken from the sea
Drawn home, shall . . . O, and it must surely be !
Else men shall know there is no God, no light
In Heaven, if wrong to the end shall conquer right.

CHORUS.

Comest thou, comest thou now,
Chained by the years and slow,
O Day long sought ?
A light on the mountains cold
Is lit, yea, a fire burneth.
'Tis the light of one that turneth
From roamings manifold,
Back out of exile old
To the house that knew him not.

Some spirit hath turned our way,
Victory visible,
Walking at thy right hand,
Belovèd ; O lift this day
Thine arms, thy voice, as a spell ;
And pray for thy brother, pray,
Threading the perilous land,
That all be well !

ORESTES.

Enough ; this dear delight is mine at last
Of thine embracing ; and the hour comes fast

When we shall stand again as now we stand,
 And stint not.—Stay, Old Man : thou, being at hand
 At the edge of time, advise me, by what way
 Best to requite my father's murderers. Say,
 Have I in Argos any still to trust ;
 Or is the love, once borne me, trod in dust,
 Even as my fortunes are ? Whom shall I seek ?
 By day or night ? And whither turn, to wreak
 My will on them that hate us ? Say.

OLD MAN.

My son,

In thine adversity, there is not one
 Will call thee friend. Nay, that were treasure-trove,
 A friend to share, not faltering from love,
 Fair days and foul the same. Thy name is gone
 Forth to all Argos, as a thing o'erthrown
 And dead. Thou hast not left one spark to glow
 With hope in one friend's heart ! Hear all, and
 know :

Thou hast God's fortune and thine own right hand,
 Naught else, to conquer back thy fatherland.

ORESTES.

The deed, the deed ! What must we do ?

OLD MAN.

Strike down

Aegisthus . . . and thy mother.

ORESTES.

'Tis the crown

My race is run for. But how find him ?

OLD MAN.

Not

Within the city walls, however hot
Thy spirit.

ORESTES.

Ha ! With watchers doth he go
Begirt, and mailed pikemen ?

OLD MAN.

Even so :

He lives in fear of thee, and night nor day
Hath slumber.

ORESTES.

That way blocked !—'Tis thine to say
What next remains.

OLD MAN.

I will ; and thou give ear.
A thought has found me !

ORESTES.

All good thoughts be near,
For thee to speak and me to understand !

OLD MAN.

But now I saw Aegisthus, close at hand
As here I journeyed.

ORESTES.

That good word shall trace
My path for me ! Thou saw'st him ? In what place ?

OLD MAN.

Out on the pastures where his horses stray.

ORESTES.

What did he there so far ?—A gleam of day
Crosseth our darkness.

OLD MAN.

'Twas a feast, methought,
Of worship to the wild-wood nymphs he wrought.

ORESTES.

The watchers of men's birth ? Is there a son
New born to him, or doth he pray for one
That cometh ? *[Movement of ELECTRA.]*

OLD MAN.

More I know not ; he had there
A wreathèd ox, as for some weighty prayer.

ORESTES.

What force was with him ? Not his serfs alone ?

OLD MAN.

No Argive lord was there ; none but his own
Household.

ORESTES.

Not any that might know my race,
Or guess ?

OLD MAN.

Thralls, thralls ; who ne'er have seen thy face.

ORESTES.

Once I prevail, the thralls will welcome me !

OLD MAN.

The slaves' way, that ; and no ill thing for thee !

ORESTES.

How can I once come near him ?

OLD MAN.

Walk thy ways

Hard by, where he may see thee, ere he slays

His sacrifice.

ORESTES.

How ? Is the road so nigh ?

OLD MAN.

He cannot choose but see thee, passing by,

And bid thee stay to share the beast they kill.

ORESTES.

A bitter fellow-feaster, if God will !

OLD MAN.

And then . . . then swift be heart and brain, to see
God's chances !

ORESTES.

Aye. Well hast thou counselled me.
But . . . where is she ?

OLD MAN.

In Argos now, I guess ;
But goes to join her husband, ere the press
Of the feast.

ORESTES.

Why goeth not my mother straight
Forth at her husband's side ?

OLD MAN.

She fain will wait
Until the gathered country-folk be gone.

ORESTES.

Enough ! She knows what eyes are turned upon
Her passings in the land !

OLD MAN.

Aye, all men hate
The unholy woman.

ORESTES.

How then can I set
My snare for wife and husband in one breath ?

ELECTRA (*coming forward*).

Hold ! It is I must work our mother's death.

ORESTES.

If that be done, I think the other deed
Fortune will guide.

ELECTRA.

This man must help our need,
One friend alone for both.

OLD MAN.

He will, he will !
Speak on. What cunning hast thou found to fill
Thy purpose ?

ELECTRA.

Get thee forth, Old Man, and quick
Tell Clytemnestra . . . tell her I lie sick,
New-mothered of a man-child.

OLD MAN.

Thou hast borne
A son ! But when ?

ELECTRA.

Let this be the tenth morn.
Till then a mother stays in sanctity,
Unseen.

OLD MAN.

And if I tell her, where shall be
The death in this ?

ELECTRA.

That word let her but hear,
Straight she will seek me out !

OLD MAN.

The queen ! What care
Hath she for thee, or pain of thine ?

ELECTRA.

She will ;
And weep my babe's low station !

OLD MAN.

Thou hast skill
To know her, child ; say on.

ELECTRA.

But bring her here,
Here to my hand ; the rest will come.

OLD MAN.

I swear,
Here at the gate she shall stand palpable !

ELECTRA.

The gate : the gate that leads to me and Hell.

OLD MAN.

Let me but see it, and I die content.

ELECTRA.

First, then, my brother : see his steps be bent . . .

OLD MAN.

Straight yonder, where Aegisthus makes his prayer !

ELECTRA.

Then seek my mother's presence, and declare
My news.

OLD MAN.

Thy very words, child, as tho' spoke
From thine own lips !

ELECTRA.

Brother, thine hour is struck.
Thou standest in the van of war this day.

ORESTES (*rousing himself*).

Aye, I am ready. . . . I will go my way,
If but some man will guide me.

OLD MAN.

Here am I,
To speed thee to the end, right thankfully.

ORESTES (*turning as he goes and raising his hands to
heaven*).

Zeus of my sires, Zeus of the lost battle,

ELECTRA.

Have pity ; have pity ; we have earned it well !

OLD MAN.

Pity these twain, of thine own body sprung !

ELECTRA.

O Queen o'er Argive altars, Hera high,

ORESTES.

Grant us thy strength, if for the right we cry.

OLD MAN.

Strength to these twain, to right their father's wrong

ELECTRA.

O Earth, deep Earth, to whom I yearn in vain,

ORESTES.

And deeper thou, O father darkly slain,

OLD MAN.

Thy children call, who love thee : hearken thou !

ORESTES.

Girt with thine own dead armies, wake, O wake !

ELECTRA.

With all that died at Ilion for thy sake . . .

OLD MAN.

And hate earth's dark defilers ; help us now !

ELECTRA.

Dost hear us yet, O thou in deadly wrong,
Wronged by my mother ?

OLD MAN.

Child, we stay too long
He hears ; be sure he hears !

ELECTRA.

And while he hears
I speak this word for omen in his ears :

"Aegisthus dies, Aegisthus dies." . . . Ah me,
 My brother, should it strike not him, but thee,
 This wrestling with dark death, behold, I too
 Am dead that hour. Think of me as one true,
 Not one that lives. I have a sword made keen
 For this, and shall strike deep.

I will go in
 And make all ready. If there come from thee
 Good tidings, all my house for ecstasy
 Shall cry ; and if we hear that thou art dead,
 Then comes the other end !—Lo, I have said.

ORESTES.

I know all, all.

ELECTRA.

Then be a man to-day !

[ORESTES *and the OLD MAN* depart.

O Women, let your voices from this fray
 Flash me a fiery signal, where I sit,
 The sword across my knees, expecting it.
 For never, though they kill me, shall they touch
 My living limbs !—I know my way thus much.

[*She goes into the house.*

CHORUS.

When white-haired folk are met	[<i>Strophe.</i>
In Argos about the fold,	
A story lingereth yet,	
A voice of the mountains old,	
That tells of the Lamb of Gold :	

A lamb from a mother mild,
But the gold of it curled and beat ;
And Pan, who holdeth the keys of the wild,
Bore it to Atreus' feet :
His wild reed pipes he blew,
And the reeds were filled with peace,
And a joy of singing before him flew,
Over the fiery fleece :
And up on the basèd rock,
As a herald cries, cried he :
"Gather ye, gather, O Argive folk,
The King's Sign to see,
The sign of the blest of God,
For he that hath this, hath all !"
Therefore the dance of praise they trod
In the Atreïd brethren's hall.

They opened before men's eyes [*Antistrophe.*
That which was hid before,
The chambers of sacrifice,
The dark of the golden door,
And fires on the altar floor.
And bright was every street,
And the voice of the Muses' tree,
The carven lotus, was lifted sweet ;
When afar and suddenly,
Strange songs, and a voice that grew :
"Come to your king, ye folk !
Mine, mine, is the Golden Ewe !"
'Twas dark Thyestes spoke.
For, lo, when the world was still,
With his brother's bride he lay,
And won her to work his will,
And they stole the Lamb away !

Then forth to the folk strode he,
And called them about his fold,
And showed that Sign of the King to be,
'The fleece and the horns of gold.

Then, then, the world was changed ; [*Strophe 2.*
And the Father, where they ranged,
Shook the golden stars and glowing,
And the great Sun stood deranged
In the glory of his going.

Lo, from that day forth, the East
Bears the sunrise on his breast,
And the flaming Day in heaven
Down the dim ways of the west
Driveth, to be lost at even.

The wet clouds to Northward beat ;
And Lord Ammon's desert seat
Crieth from the South, unslaken,
For the dews that once were sweet,
For the rain that God hath taken.

'Tis a children's tale, that old [*Antistrophe 2.*
Shepherds on far hills have told ;
And we reck not of their telling,
Deem not that the Sun of gold
Ever turned his fiery dwelling,

Or beat backward in the sky,
For the wrongs of man, the cry
Of his ailing tribes assembled,
To do justly, ere they die !
Once, men told the tale, and trembled ;

Fearing God, O Queen : whom thou
 Hast forgotten, till thy brow
 With old blood is dark and daunted.
 And thy brethren, even now,
 Walk among the stars, enchanted.

LEADER.

Ha, friends, was that a voice? Or some dream
 sound
 Of voices shaketh me, as underground
 God's thunder shuddering? Hark, again, and clear!
 It swells upon the wind.—Come forth and hear!
 Mistress, Electra!

ELECTRA, *a bare sword in her hand, comes
 from the house.*

ELECTRA.

Friends! Some news is brought?
 How hath the battle ended?

LEADER.

I know naught.
 There seemed a cry as of men massacred!

ELECTRA.

I heard it too. Far off, but still I heard.

LEADER.

A distant floating voice . . . Ah, plainer now!

ELECTRA.

Of Argive anguish !—Brother, is it thou !

LEADER.

I know not. Many confused voices cry . . .

ELECTRA.

Death, then for me ! That answer bids me die.

LEADER.

Nay, wait ! We know not yet thy fortune. Wait !

ELECTRA.

No messenger from him !—Too late, too late !

LEADER.

The message yet will come. 'Tis not a thing
So light of compass, to strike down a king.

Enter a MESSENGER, running.

MESSENGER.

Victory, Maids of Argos, Victory !
Orestes . . . all that love him, list to me ! . . .
Hath conquered ! Agamemnon's murderer lies
Dead ! O give thanks to God with happy cries !

ELECTRA.

Who art thou ? I mistrust thee. . . . 'Tis a plot !

MESSENGER.

Thy brother's man. Look well. Dost know me not ?

ELECTRA.

Friend, friend ; my terror made me not to see
 Thy visage. Now I know and welcome thee.
 How sayst thou ? He is dead, verily dead,
 My father's murderer . . . ?

MESSENGER.

Shall it be said

Once more ? I know again and yet again
 Thy heart would hear. Aegisthus lieth slain !

ELECTRA.

Ye Gods ! And thou, O Right, that seest all,
 Art come at last ? . . . But speak ; how did he fall ?
 How swooped the wing of death ? . . . I crave
 to hear.

MESSENGER.

Forth of this hut we set our faces clear
 To the world, and struck the open chariot road ;
 Then on toward the pasture lands, where stood
 The great Lord of Mycenae. In a set
 Garden beside a channelled rivulet,
 Culling a myrtle garland for his brow,
 He walked : but hailed us as we passed : " How now,
 Strangers ! Who are ye ? Of what city sprung,
 And whither bound ? " " Thessalians," answered
 young

Orestes : " to Alpheüs journeying,
 With gifts to Olympian Zeus." Whereat the king :
 " This while, beseech you, tarry, and make full
 The feast upon my hearth. We slay a bull

Here to the Nymphs. Set forth at break of day
To-morrow, and 'twill cost you no delay.
But come"—and so he gave his hand, and led
The two men in—"I must not be gainsaid ;
Come to the house. Ho, there ; set close at hand
Vats of pure water, that the guests may stand
At the altar's verge, where falls the holy spray."
Then quickly spake Orestes : " By the way
We cleansed us in a torrent stream. We need
No purifying here. But if indeed
Strangers may share thy worship, here are we
Ready, O King, and swift to follow thee."

So spoke they in the midst. And every thrall
Laid down the spears they served the King withal,
And hied him to the work. Some bore amain
The death-vat, some the corbs of hallowed grain ;
Or kindled fire, and round the fire and in
Set cauldrons foaming ; and a festal din
Filled all the place. Then took thy mother's lord
The ritual grains, and o'er the altar poured
Its due, and prayed : " O Nymphs of Rock and
Mere,

With many a sacrifice for many a year,
May I and she who waits at home for me,
My Tyndarid Queen, adore you. May it be
Peace with us always, even as now ; and all
Ill to mine enemies"—meaning withal
Thee and Orestes. Then my master prayed
Against that prayer, but silently, and said
No word, to win once more his fatherland.
Then in the corb Aegisthus set his hand,
Took the straight blade, cut from the proud bull's head
A lock, and laid it where the fire was red ;

Then, while the young men held the bull on high,
Slew it with one clean gash ; and suddenly
Turned on thy brother : “ Stranger, every true
Thessalian, so the story goes, can hew
A bull’s limbs clean, and tame a mountain steed.
Take up the steel, and show us if indeed
Rumour speak true.” Right swift Orestes took
The Dorian blade, back from his shoulders shook
His broochèd mantle, called on Pylades
To aid him, and waved back the thralls. With ease
Heelwise he held the bull, and with one glide
Bared the white limb ; then stripped the mighty
hide

From off him, swifter than a runner runs
His furlongs, and laid clean the flank. At once
Aegisthus stooped, and lifted up with care
The ominous parts, and gazed. No lobe was there ;
But lo, strange caves of gall, and, darkly raised,
The portal vein boded to him that gazed
Fell visitations. Dark as night his brow
Clouded. Then spake Orestes : “ Why art thou
Cast down so sudden ? ” “ Guest,” he cried, “ there be
Treasons from whence I know not, seeking me.
Of all my foes, ’tis Agamemnon’s son ;
His hate is on my house, like war.” “ Have done ! ”
Orestes cried : “ thou fear’st an exile’s plot,
Lord of a city ? Make thy cold heart hot
With meat.—Ho, fling me a Thessalian steel !
This Dorian is too light. I will unseal
The breast of him.” He took the heavier blade,
And clave the bone. And there Aegisthus stayed,
The omens in his hand, dividing slow
This sign from that ; till, while his head bent low,

Up with a leap thy brother flashed the sword,
Then down upon his neck, and cleft the cord
Of brain and spine. Shuddering the body stood
One instant in an agony of blood,
And gasped and fell. The henchmen saw, and
straight

Flew to their spears, a host of them to set
Against those twain. But there the twain did
stand

Unfaltering, each his iron in his hand,
Edge fronting edge. Till "Hold," Orestes calls :
"I come not as in wrath against these walls
And mine own people. One man righteously
I have slain, who slew my father. It is I,
The wronged Orestes ! Hold, and smite me not,
Old housefolk of my father !" When they caught
That name, their lances fell. And one old man,
An ancient in the house, drew nigh to scan
His face, and knew him. Then with one accord
They crowned thy brother's temples, and outpoured
Joy and loud songs. And hither now he fares
To show the head, no Gorgon, that he bears,
But that Aegisthus whom thou hatest ! Yea,
Blood against blood, his debt is paid this day.

*[He goes off to meet the others—ELECTRA stands
as though stupefied.]*

CHORUS.

Now, now thou shalt dance in our dances,
Beloved, as a fawn in the night !
The wind is astir for the glances
Of thy feet ; thou art robed with delight.

He hath conquered, he cometh to free us
 With garlands new-won,
 More high than the crowns of Alpheüs,
 Thine own father's son :
 Cry, cry, for the day that is won !

ELECTRA.

O Light of the Sun, O chariot wheels of flame,
 O Earth and Night, dead Night without a name
 That held me ! Now mine eyes are raised to see,
 And all the doorways of my soul flung free.
 Aegisthus dead ! My father's murderer dead !

What have I still of wreathing for the head
 Stored in my chambers ? Let it come forth now
 To bind my brother's and my conqueror's brow.

[Some garlands are brought out from the house to
 ELECTRA.

CHORUS.

Go, gather thy garlands, and lay them
 As a crown on his brow, many-tressed,
 But our feet shall refrain not nor stay them :
 'Tis the joy that the Muses have blest.
 For our king is returned as from prison,
 The old king, to be master again,
 Our belovèd in justice re-risen :
 With guile he hath slain . . .
 But cry, cry in joyance again !

*[There enter from the left ORESTES and PYLADES,
 followed by some thralls.*

ELECTRA.

O conqueror, come ! The king that trampled Troy
 Knoweth his son Orestes. Come in joy,
 Brother, and take to bind thy rippling hair
 My crowns ! . . . O what are crowns, that runners
 wear

For some vain race ? But thou in battle true
 Hast felled our foe Aegisthus, him that slew
 By craft thy sire and mine. [*She crowns* ORESTES.

And thou no less,

O friend at need, O reared in righteousness,
 Take, Pylades, this chaplet from my hand.

'Twas half thy battle. And may ye two stand
 Thus alway, victory-crowned, before my face !

[*She crowns* PYLADES.

ORESTES.

Electra, first as workers of this grace
 Praise thou the Gods, and after, if thou will,
 Praise also me, as chosen to fulfil
 God's work and Fate's. — Aye, 'tis no more a
 dream ;

In very deed I come from slaying him.
 Thou hast the knowledge clear, but lo, I bring
 More also. See himself, dead !

[*Attendants bring in the body of* AEGISTHUS *on a bier.*

Wouldst thou fling
 This lord on the rotting earth for beasts to tear ?
 Or up, where all the vultures of the air
 May glut them, pierce and nail him for a sign
 Far off ? Work all thy will. Now he is thine.

ELECTRA.

It shames me ; yet, God knows, I hunger sore—

ORESTES.

What wouldst thou ? Speak ; the old fear nevermore
Need touch thee.

ELECTRA.

To let loose upon the dead
My hate ! Perchance to rouse on mine own head
The sleeping hate of the world ?

ORESTES.

No man that lives
Shall scathe thee by one word.

ELECTRA.

Our city gives
Quick blame ; and little love have men for me.

ORESTES.

If aught thou hast unsaid, sister, be free
And speak. Between this man and us no bar
Cometh nor stint, but the utter rage of war.

*[She goes and stands over the body. A moment's
silence.]*

ELECTRA.

Ah me, what have I ? What first flood of hate
To loose upon thee ? What last curse to sate
My pain, or river of wild words to flow
Bank-high between ? . . . Nothing ? . . . And yet
I know

There hath not passed one sun, but through the long
Cold dawns, over and over, like a song,
I have said them—words held back, O, some day yet
To flash into thy face, would but the fret
Of ancient fear fall loose and let me free.
And free I am, now ; and can pay to thee
At last the weary debt.

Oh, thou didst kill

My soul within. Who wrought thee any ill,
That thou shouldst make me fatherless ? Aye, me
And this my brother, loveless, solitary ?
'Twas thou, didst bend my mother to her shame :
Thy weak hand murdered him who led to fame
The hosts of Hellas—thou, that never crossed
O'erseas to Troy ! . . . God help thee, wast thou lost
In blindness, long ago, dreaming, some-wise,
She would be true with thee, whose sin and lies
Thyself had tasted in my father's place ?
And then, that thou wert happy, when thy days
Were all one pain ? Thou knewest ceaselessly
Her kiss a thing unclean, and she knew thee
A lord so little true, so dearly won !
So lost ye both, being in falseness one,
What fortune else had granted ; she thy curse,
Who marred thee as she loved thee, and thou hers . . .
And on thy ways thou heardest men whispering,
“ Lo, the Queen's husband yonder ”—not “ the King.”

And then the lie of lies that dimmed thy brow,
Vaunting that by thy gold, thy chattels, Thou
Wert Something ; which themselves are nothingness,
Shadows, to clasp a moment ere they cease.
The thing thou art, and not the things thou hast,
Abideth, yea, and bindeth to the last

Thy burden on thee : while all else, ill-won
 And sin-companioned, like a flower o'erblown,
 Flies on the wind away.

Or didst thou find
 In women . . . Women? . . . Nay, peace, peace!
 The blind

Could read thee. Cruel wast thou in thine hour,
 Lord of a great king's house, and like a tower
 Firm in thy beauty.

[Starting back with a look of loathing.

Ah, that girl-like face!

God grant, not that, not that, but some plain grace
 Of manhood to the man who brings me love :
 A father of straight children, that shall move
 Swift on the wings of War.

So, get thee gone !

Naught knowing how the great years, rolling on,
 Have laid thee bare, and thy long debt full paid.

O vaunt not, if one step be proudly made
 In evil, that all Justice is o'ercast :
 Vaunt not, ye men of sin, ere at the last
 The thin-drawn marge before you glimmereth
 Close, and the goal that wheels 'twixt life and death.

LEADER.

Justice is mighty. Passing dark hath been
 His sin : and dark the payment of his sin.

ELECTRA (*with a weary sigh, turning from the body*).
 Ah me ! Go some of you, bear him from sight,
 That when my mother come, her eyes may light
 On nothing, nothing, till she know the sword . . .

[The body is borne into the hut. PYLADES goes with it.

ORESTES (*looking along the road*).

Stay, 'tis a new thing ! We have still a word
To speak . . .

ELECTRA.

What ? Not a rescue from the town
Thou seest ?

ORESTES.

'Tis my mother comes : my own
Mother, that bare me. [*He takes off his crown.*]

ELECTRA (*springing, as it were, to life again, and
moving where she can see the road*).

Straight into the snare !
Aye, there she cometh.—Welcome in thy rare
Chariot ! All welcome in thy brave array !

ORESTES.

What would we with our mother ? Didst thou say
Kill her ?

ELECTRA (*turning on him*).

What ? Is it pity ? Dost thou fear
To see thy mother's shape ?

ORESTES.

'Twas she that bare
My body into life. She gave me suck.
How can I strike her ?

ELECTRA.

Strike her as she struck

Our father !

ORESTES (*to himself, brooding*).

Phoebus, God, was all thy mind
Turned unto darkness ?

ELECTRA.

If thy God be blind,
Shalt thou have light ?

ORESTES (*as before*).

Thou, thou, didst bid me kill
My mother : which is sin.

ELECTRA.

How brings it ill
To thee, to raise our father from the dust ?

ORESTES.

I was a clean man once. Shall I be thrust
From men's sight, blotted with her blood ?

ELECTRA.

Thy blot
Is black as death if him thou succour not !

ORESTES.

Who shall do judgment on me, when she dies ?

ELECTRA.

Who shall do judgment, if thy father lies
Forgotten?

ORESTES (*turning suddenly to ELECTRA*).

Stay! How if some fiend of Hell,
Hid in God's likeness, spake that oracle?

ELECTRA.

In God's own house? I trow not.

ORESTES.

And I trow
It was an evil charge! [*He moves away from her.*]

ELECTRA (*almost despairing*).

To fail me now!
To fail me now! A coward!—O brother, no!

ORESTES.

What shall it be, then? The same stealthy blow . . .

ELECTRA.

That slew our father! Courage! thou hast slain
Aegisthus.

ORESTES.

Aye. So be it.—I have ta'en
A path of many terrors: and shall do
Deeds horrible. 'Tis God will have it so. . . .
Is this the joy of battle, or wild woe?
[*He goes into the house.*]

LEADER.

O Queen o'er Argos thronèd high,
 O Woman, sister of the twain,
 God's Horsemen, stars without a stain,
 Whose home is in the deathless sky,
 Whose glory in the sea's wild pain,
 Toiling to succour men that die :
 Long years above us hast thou been,
 God-like for gold and marvelled power :
 Ah, well may mortal eyes this hour
 Observe thy state : All hail, O Queen !

*Enter from the right CLYTEMNESTRA on a chariot,
 accompanied by richly dressed Handmaidens.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Down from the wain, ye dames of Troy, and hold
 Mine arm as I dismount. . . .

[*Answering ELECTRA's thought.*

The spoils and gold
 Of Ilion I have sent out of my hall
 To many shrines. These bondwomen are all
 I keep in mine own house . . . Deemst thou the
 cost
 Too rich to pay me for the child I lost—
 Fair though they be ?

ELECTRA.

Nay, Mother, here am I
 Bond likewise, yea, and homeless, to hold high
 Thy royal arm !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Child, the war-slaves are here ;
Thou needst not toil.

ELECTRA.

What was it but the spear
Of war, drove me forth too ? Mine enemies
Have sacked my father's house, and, even as these,
Captives and fatherless, made me their prey.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It was thy father cast his child away,
A child he might have loved ! . . . Shall I speak
out ?

(*Controlling herself*) Nay ; when a woman once is
caught about

With evil fame, there riseth in her tongue
A bitter spirit—wrong, I know ! Yet, wrong
Or right, I charge ye look on the deeds done ;
And if ye needs must hate, when all is known,
Hate on ! What profits loathing ere ye know ?

My father gave me to be his. 'Tis so.
But was it his to kill me, or to kill
The babes I bore ? Yet, lo, he tricked my will
With fables of Achilles' love : he bore
To Aulis and the dark ship-clutching shore,
He held above the altar-flame, and smote,
Cool as one reaping, through the strained throat,
My white Iphigenia. . . . Had it been
To save some falling city, leaguered in

With foemen ; to prop up our castle towers,
And rescue other children that were ours,
Giving one life for many, by God's laws
I had forgiven all ! Not so. Because
Helen was wanton, and her master knew
No curb for her : for that, for that, he slew
My daughter !—Even then, with all my wrong,
No wild beast yet was in me. Nay, for long,
I never would have killed him. But he came,
At last, bringing that damsel, with the flame
Of God about her, mad and knowing all :
And set her in my room ; and in one wall
Would hold two queens !—O wild are woman's eyes
And hot her heart. I say not otherwise.
But, being thus wild, if then her master stray
To love far off, and cast his own away,
Shall not her will break prison too, and wend
Somewhere to win some other for a friend ?
And then on us the world's curse waxes strong
In righteousness ! The lords of all the wrong
Must hear no curse !—I slew him. I trod then
The only road : which led me to the men
He hated. Of the friends of Argos whom
Durst I have sought, to aid me to the doom
I craved ?—Speak if thou wouldst, and fear not me,
If yet thou deemst him slain unrighteously.

LEADER.

Thy words be just, yet shame their justice brings ;
A woman true of heart should bear all things
From him she loves. And she who feels it not,
I cannot reason of her, nor speak aught.

ELECTRA.

Remember, mother, thy last word of grace,
Bidding me speak, and fear not, to thy face.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So said I truly, child, and so say still.

ELECTRA.

Wilt softly hear, and after work me ill?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not so, not so. I will but pleasure thee.

ELECTRA.

I answer then. And, mother, this shall be
My prayer of opening, where hangs the whole :
Would God that He had made thee clean of soul !
Helen and thou—O, face and form were fair,
Meet for men's praise ; but sisters twain ye were,
Both things of naught, a stain on Castor's star.
And Helen slew her honour, borne afar
In wilful ravishment : but thou didst slay
The highest man of the world. And now wilt say
'Twas wrought in justice for thy child laid low
At Aulis ? . . . Ah, who knows thee as I know ?
Thou, thou, who long ere aught of ill was done
Thy child, when Agamemnon scarce was gone,
Sate at the looking-glass, and tress by tress
Didst comb the twin'd gold in loneliness.
When any wife, her lord being far away,
Toils to be fair, O blot her out that day

As false within ! What would she with a cheek
So bright in strange men's eyes, unless she seek
Some treason ? None but I, thy child, could so
Watch thee in Hellas : none but I could know
Thy face of gladness when our enemies
Were strong, and the swift cloud upon thine eyes
If Troy seemed falling, all thy soul keen-set
Praying that he might come no more ! . . . And yet
It was so easy to be true. A king
Was thine, not feebler, not in anything
Below Aegisthus ; one whom Hellas chose
For chief beyond all kings. Aye, and God knows,
How sweet a name in Greece, after the sin
Thy sister wrought, lay in thy ways to win.
Ill deeds make fair ones shine, and turn thereto
Men's eyes.—Enough : but say he wronged thee ; slew
By craft thy child :—what wrong had I done, what
The babe Orestes ? Why didst render not
Back unto us, the children of the dead,
Our father's portion ? Must thou heap thy bed
With gold of murdered men, to buy to thee
Thy strange man's arms ? Justice ! Why is not he
Who cast Orestes out, cast out again ?
Not slain for me whom doubly he hath slain,
In living death, more bitter than of old
My sister's ? Nay, when all the tale is told
Of blood for blood, what murder shall we make,
I and Orestes, for our father's sake ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, child ; I know thy heart, from long ago.
Thou hast alway loved him best. 'Tis oft-time so :
One is her father's daughter, and one hot

To bear her mother's part. I blame thee not . . .
Yet think not I am happy, child ; nor flown
With pride now, in the deeds my hand hath done . . .

[*Seeing ELECTRA unsympathetic, she checks herself.*]

But thou art all untended, comfortless
Of body and wild of raiment ; and thy stress
Of travail scarce yet ended ! . . . Woe is me !
'Tis all as I have willed it. Bitterly
I wrought against him, to the last blind deep
Of bitterness. . . . Woe's me !

ELECTRA.

Fair days to weep,
When help is not ! Or stay : though he lie cold
Long since, there lives another of thy fold
Far off ; there might be pity for thy son ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I dare not ! . . . Yes, I fear him. 'Tis mine own
Life, and not his, comes first. And rumour saith
His heart yet burneth for his father's death.

ELECTRA.

Why dost thou keep thine husband ever hot
Against me ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis his mood. And thou art not
So gentle, child !

ELECTRA.

My spirit is too sore !
Howbeit, from this day I will no more
Hate him.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*with a flash of hope*).

O daughter !—Then, indeed, shall he,
I promise, never more be harsh to thee !

ELECTRA.

He lieth in my house, as 'twere his own.
'Tis that hath made him proud.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, art thou flown
To strife again so quick, child ?

ELECTRA.

Well ; I say
No more ; long have I feared him, and alway
Shall fear him, even as now !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, daughter, peace !
It bringeth little profit, speech like this . . .
Why didst thou call me hither ?

ELECTRA.

It reached thee,
My word that a man-child is born to me ?
Do thou make offering for me—for the rite
I know not—as is meet on the tenth night.
I cannot ; I have borne no child till now.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Who tended thee ? 'Tis she should make the vow.

ELECTRA.

None tended me. Alone I bare my child.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What, is thy cot so friendless? And this wild
So far from aid?

ELECTRA.

Who seeks for friendship sake
A beggar's house?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I will go in, and make
Due worship for thy child, the Peace-bringer.
To all thy need I would be minister.
Then to my lord, where by the meadow side
He prays the woodland nymphs.

Ye handmaids, guide
My chariot to the stall, and when ye guess
The rite draws near its end, in readiness
Be here again. Then to my lord! . . . I owe
My lord this gladness, too.

*[The Attendants depart; CLYTEMNESTRA, left
alone, proceeds to enter the house.]*

ELECTRA.

Welcome below
My narrow roof! But have a care withal,
A grime of smoke lies deep upon the wall.
Soil not thy robe! . . .

Not far now shall it be,
 The sacrifice God asks of me and thee.
 The bread of Death is broken, and the knife
 Lifted again that drank the Wild Bull's life :
 And on his breast . . . Ha, Mother, hast slept well
 Aforetime ? Thou shalt lie with him in Hell.
 That grace I give to cheer thee on thy road ;
 Give thou to me—peace from my father's blood !
[She follows her mother into the house.]

CHORUS.

Lo, the returns of wrong.
 The wind as a changèd thing
 Whispereth overhead
 Of one that of old lay dead
 In the water lapping long :
 My King, O my King !

A cry in the rafters then
 Rang, and the marble dome :
 "Mercy of God, not thou,
 "Woman ! To slay me now,
 "After the harvests ten
 "Now, at the last, come home !"

O Fate shall turn as the tide,
 Turn, with a doom of tears
 For the flying heart too fond ;
 A doom for the broken bond.
 She hailed him there in his pride,
 Home from the perilous years,

In the heart of his wallèd lands,
In the Giants' cloud-capt ring ;
Herself, none other, laid
The hone to the axe's blade ;
She lifted it in her hands,
The woman, and slew her king.

Woe upon spouse and spouse,
Whatso of evil sway
Held her in that distress !
Even as a lioness
Breaketh the woodland boughs
Starving, she wrought her way.

VOICE OF CLYTEMNESTRA.

O Children, Children ; in the name of God,
Slay not your mother !

A WOMAN.

Did ye hear a cry
Under the rafters ?

ANOTHER.

I weep too, yea, I ;
Down on the mother's heart the child hath trod !
[*A death-cry from within.*]

ANOTHER.

God bringeth Justice in his own slow tide.
Aye, cruel is thy doom ; but thy deeds done
Evil, thou piteous woman, and on one
Whose sleep was by thy side !

[*The door bursts open, and ORESTES and
ELECTRA come forth in disorder. Attendants
bring out the bodies of CLYTEMNESTRA
and AEGISTHUS.*]

LEADER.

Lo, yonder, in their mother's new-spilt gore
Red-garmented and ghastly, from the door
They reel. . . . O horrible ! Was it agony
Like this, she boded in her last wild cry ?
There lives no seed of man calamitous,
Nor hath lived, like this seed of Tantalus.

ORESTES.

O Dark of the Earth, O God,
Thou to whom all is plain ;
Look on my sin, my blood,
This horror of dead things twain :
Gathered as one they lie
Slain ; and the slayer was I,
I, to pay for my pain !

ELECTRA.

Let tear rain upon tear,
Brother : but mine is the blame.
A fire stood over her,
And out of the fire I came,
I, in my misery. . . .
And I was the child at her knee.
'Mother' I named her name.

CHORUS.

Alas for Fate, for the Fate of thee,
O Mother, Mother of Misery :
And Misery, lo, hath turned again,

To slay thee, Misery and more,
Even in the fruit thy body bore.
Yet hast thou Justice, Justice plain,
For a sire's blood spilt of yore !

ORESTES.

Apollo, alas for the hymn
Thou sangest, as hope in mine ear !
The Song was of Justice dim,
But the Deed is anguish clear ;
And the Gift, long nights of fear,
Of blood and of wandering,
Where cometh no Greek thing,
Nor sight, nor sound on the air.
Yea, and beyond, beyond,
Roaming—what rest is there ?
Who shall break bread with me ?
Who, that is clean, shall see
And hate not the blood-red hand,
His mother's murderer ?

ELECTRA.

And I ? What clime shall hold
My evil, or roof it above ?
I cried for dancing of old,
I cried in my heart for love :
What dancing waiteth me now ?
What love that shall kiss my brow
Nor blench at the brand thereof ?

CHORUS.

Back, back, in the wind and rain
Thy driven spirit wheeleth again.

Now is thine heart made clean within
That was dark of old and murder-fraught.
But, lo, thy brother ; what hast thou wrought . . .
Yea, though I love thee . . . what woe, what sin,
On him, who willed it not !

ORESTES.

Saw'st thou her raiment there,
Sister, there in the blood ?
She drew it back as she stood,
She opened her bosom bare,
She bent her knees to the earth,
The knees that bent in my birth . . .
And I . . . Oh, her hair, her hair . . .
[He breaks into inarticulate weeping.]

CHORUS.

Oh, thou didst walk in agony,
Hearing thy mother's cry, the cry
Of wordless wailing, well know I.

ELECTRA.

She stretched her hand to my cheek,
And there brake from her lips a moan ;
'Mercy, my child, my own !'
Her hand clung to my cheek ;
Clung, and my arm was weak ;
And the sword fell and was gone.

CHORUS.

Unhappy woman, could thine eye
Look on the blood, and see her lie,
Thy mother, where she turned to die ?

ORESTES.

I lifted over mine eyes
My mantle : blinded I smote,
As one smiteth a sacrifice ;
And the sword found her throat.

ELECTRA.

I gave thee the sign and the word ;
I touched with mine hand thy sword.

LEADER.

Dire is the grief ye have wrought.

ORESTES.

Sister, touch her again :
Oh, veil the body of her ;
Shed on her raiment fair,
And close that death-red stain.
—Mother! And didst thou bear,
Bear in thy bitter pain,
To life, thy murderer ?
[*The two kneel over the body of* CLYTEMNESTRA,
and cover her with raiment.

ELECTRA.

On her that I loved of yore,
Robe upon robe I cast :
On her that I hated sore.

CHORUS.

O House that hath hated sore,
Behold thy peace at the last !

LEADER.

Ha, see : above the roof-tree high
 There shineth . . . Is some spirit there
 Of earth or heaven ? That thin air
 Was never trod by things that die !

What bodes it now that forth they fare,
 To men revealèd visibly ?

*[There appears in the air a vision of CASTOR and
 POLYDEUCES. The mortals kneel or veil
 their faces.]*

CASTOR.

Thou Agamemnon's Son, give ear ! 'Tis we,
 Castor and Polydeuces, call to thee,
 God's Horsemen and thy mother's brethren twain.
 An Argive ship, spent with the toiling main,
 We bore but now to peace, and, here withal
 Being come, have seen thy mother's bloody fall,
 Our sister's. Righteous is her doom this day,
 But not thy deed. And Phoebus, Phoebus . . .

Nay ;

He is my lord ; therefore I hold my peace.
 Yet though in light he dwell, no light was this
 He showed to thee, but darkness ! Which do thou
 Endure, as man must, chafing not. And now
 Fare forth where Zeus and Fate have laid thy life.

The maid Electra thou shalt give for wife
 To Pylades ; then turn thy head and flee
 From Argos' land. 'Tis never more for thee
 To tread this earth where thy dead mother lies.
 And, lo, in the air her Spirits, bloodhound eyes,

Most horrible yet Godlike, hard at heel
Following shall scourge thee as a burning wheel,
Speed-maddened. Seek thou straight Athena's land,
And round her awful image clasp thine hand,
Praying : and she will fence them back, though hot
With flickering serpents, that they touch thee not,
Holding above thy brow her gorgon shield.

There is a hill in Athens, Ares' field,
Where first for that first death by Ares done
On Halirrhothius, Poseidon's son,
Who wronged his daughter, the great Gods of
yore

Held judgment : and true judgments evermore
Flow from that Hill, trusted of man and God.
There shalt thou stand arraigned of this blood ;
And of those judges half shall lay on thee
Death, and half pardon ; so shalt thou go free.
For Phoebus in that hour, who bade thee shed
Thy mother's blood, shall take on his own head
The stain thereof. And ever from that strife
The law shall hold, that when, for death or life
Of one pursued, men's voices equal stand,
Then Mercy conquereth.—But for thee, the band
Of Spirits dread, down, down, in very wrath,
Shall sink beside that Hill, making their path
Through a dim chasm, the which shall aye be trod
By reverent feet, where men may speak with God.
But thou forgotten and far off shalt dwell,
By great Alpheüs' waters, in a dell
Of Arcady, where that gray Wolf-God's wall
Stands holy. And thy dwelling men shall call
Orestes' Town. So much to thee be spoke.
But this dead man, Aegisthus, all the folk

Shall bear to burial in a high green grave
 Of Argos. For thy mother, she shall have
 Her tomb from Menelaus, who hath come
 This day, at last, to Argos, bearing home
 Helen. From Egypt comes she, and the hall
 Of Proteus, and in Troy hath ne'er at all
 Set foot. 'Twas but a wraith of Helen, sent
 By Zeus, to make much wrath and ravishment.

So forth for home, bearing the virgin bride,
 Let Pylades make speed, and lead beside
 Thy once-named brother, and with golden store
 Stablish his house far off on Phocis' shore.

Up, gird thee now to the steep Isthmian way,
 Seeking Athena's blessèd rock; one day,
 Thy doom of blood fulfilled and this long stress
 Of penance past, thou shalt have happiness.

LEADER (*looking up*).

Is it for us, O Seed of Zeus,
 To speak and hear your words again?

CASTOR. Speak: of this blood ye bear no stain.

ELECTRA. I also, sons of Tyndareus,

My kinsmen; may my word be said?

CASTOR. Speak: on Apollo's head we lay
 The bloody doings of this day.

LEADER. Ye Gods, ye brethren of the dead,

Why held ye not the deathly herd
 Of Kêres back from off this home?

CASTOR. There came but that which needs must
 come

By ancient Fate and that dark word

That rang from Phoebus in his mood.

ELECTRA. And what should Phoebus seek with me,
Or all God's oracles that be,
That I must bear my mother's blood ?

CASTOR. Thy hand was as thy brother's hand,
Thy doom shall be as his. One stain,
From dim forefathers on the twain
Lighting, hath sapped your hearts as sand.

ORESTES After so long, sister, to see
(*who has never raised his head, nor spoken to the Gods*). And hold thee, and then part, then part,
By all that chained thee to my heart
Forsaken, and forsaking thee !

CASTOR. Husband and house are hers. She bears
No bitter judgment, save to go
Exiled from Argos.

ELECTRA. And what woe,
What tears are like an exile's tears ?

ORESTES. Exiled and more am I ; impure,
A murderer in a stranger's hand !

CASTOR. Fear not. There dwells in Pallas' land
All holiness. Till then endure !

[ORESTES and ELECTRA embrace.]

ORESTES. Aye, closer ; clasp my body well,
And let thy sorrow loose, and shed,
As o'er the grave of one new dead,
Dead evermore, thy last farewell !

[*A sound of weeping.*]

CASTOR. Alas, what would ye? For that cry
 Ourselves and all the sons of heaven
 Have pity. Yea, our peace is riven
 By the strange pain of these that die.

ORESTES. No more to see thee! ELECTRA. Nor thy
 breath
 Be near my face! ORESTES. Ah, so it
 ends.

ELECTRA. Farewell, dear Argos. All ye friends,
 Farewell! ORESTES. O faithful unto death,
 Thou goest? ELECTRA. Aye, I pass from
 you,
 Soft-eyed at last. ORESTES. Go, Pylades,
 And God go with you! Wed in peace
 My tall Electra, and be true.
 [ELECTRA and PYLADES depart to the left.]

CASTOR.

Their troth shall fill their hearts.—But on :
 Dread feet are near thee, hounds of prey,
 Snake-handed, midnight-visaged, yea,
 And bitter pains their fruit! Begone!
 [ORESTES departs to the right.]

But hark, the far Sicilian sea
 Calls, and a noise of men and ships
 That labour sunken to the lips
 In bitter billows; forth go we,
 Through the long leagues of fiery blue,
 With saving; not to souls unshriven;
 But whoso in his life hath striven
 To love things holy and be true,

Through toil and storm we guard him ; we
Save, and he shall not die !—Therefore,
O praise the lying man no more,
Nor with oath-breakers sail the sea :
Farewell, ye walkers on the shore
Of death ! A God hath counselled ye.

[CASTOR *and* POLYDEUCES *disappear.*

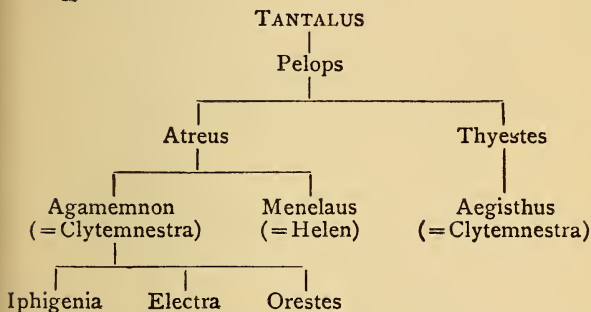
CHORUS.

Farewell, farewell !—But he who can so fare,
And stumbleth not on mischief anywhere,
Blessèd on earth is he !

NOTES TO THE ELECTRA

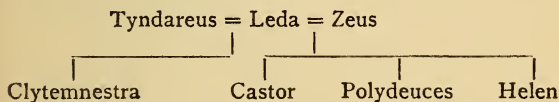
THE chief characters in the play belong to one family, as is shown by the two genealogies:—

I.



(Also, a sister of Agamemnon, name variously given, married Strophios, and was the mother of Pylades.)

II.



P. 1, l. 10, Son of his father's foe.]—Both foe and brother. Atreus and Thyestes became enemies after the theft of the Golden Lamb. See pp. 47 ff.

P. 2, l. 34, Must wed with me.]—In Aeschylus and Sophocles Electra is unmarried. This story of her peasant husband is found only in Euripides, but is

not likely to have been wantonly invented by him. It was no doubt an existing legend—an *ὦν λόγος*, to use the phrase attributed to Euripides in the *Frogs* (l. 1052). He may have chosen to adopt it for several reasons. First, to marry Electra to a peasant was a likely step for Aegisthus to take, since any child born to her afterwards would bear a stigma, calculated to damage him fatally as a pretender to the throne. Again, it seemed to explain the name "A-lektra" (as if from *λεκτρὸν*, "bed;" cf. Schol. *Orestes*, 71, Soph. *El.* 962, *Ant.* 917) more pointedly than the commoner version. And it helps in the working out of Electra's character (cf. pp. 17, 22, &c.). Also it gives an opportunity of introducing the fine character of the peasant. He is an *Αὐτουργός*, literally "self-worker," a man who works his own land, far from the city, neither a slave nor a slave-master; "the men," as Euripides says in the *Orestes* (920), "who alone save a nation." (Cf. *Bac.*, p. 115 foot, and below, p. 26, ll. 367-390.) As Euripides became more and more alienated from the town democracy he tended, like Tolstoy and others, to idealise the workers of the soil.

P. 6, l. 62, Children to our enemy.]—Cf. 626. Soph. *El.* 589. They do not seem to be in existence at the time of the play.

Pp. 5-6.]—Electra's first two speeches are admirable as expositions of her character—the morbid nursing of hatred as a duty, the deliberate posing, the impulsiveness, the quick response to kindness.

P. 7, l. 82, Pylades.]—Pylades is a *persona muta* both here and in Sophocles' *Electra*, a fixed traditional figure, possessing no quality but devotion to Orestes. In Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* he speaks only once, with tremendous effect, at the crisis of the play, to rebuke Orestes when his heart fails him. In the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, however, and still more in the *Orestes*, he is a fully studied character.

P. 10, l. 151, A swan crying alone.]—Cf. *Bacchae*,

p. 152, "As yearns the milk-white swan when old swans die."

P. 11, ll. 169 ff., The Watcher hath cried this day.]—Hera was an old Pelasgian goddess, whose worship was kept in part a mystery from the invading Achaeans or Dorians. There seems to have been a priest born "of the ancient folk," *i.e.*, a Pelasgian or aboriginal Mycenaean, who, by some secret lore—probably some ancient and superseded method of calculating the year—knew when Hera's festival was due, and walked round the country three days beforehand to announce it. He drank "the milk of the flock" and avoided wine, either from some religious taboo, or because he represented the religion of the milk-drinking mountain shepherds.

P. 13, ll. 220 ff.]—Observe Electra's cowardice when surprised; contrast her courage, p. 47, when sending Orestes off, and again her quick drop to despair when the news does not come soon enough.

P. 16, ll. 247 ff., I am a wife. . . . O better dead!]
—Rather ungenerous, when compared with her words on p. 6. (Cf. also her words on pp. 24 and 26.) But she feels this herself, almost immediately. Orestes naturally takes her to mean that her husband is one of Aegisthus' friends. This would have ruined his plot. (Cf. above, p. 8, l. 98.)

P. 22, l. 312, Castor.]—I know no other mention of Electra's betrothal to Castor. He was her kinsman: see below on l. 990.

Pp. 22-23, ll. 300-337.]—In this wonderful outbreak, observe the mixture of all sorts of personal resentments and jealousies with the devotion of the lonely woman to her father and her brother. "So men say," is an interesting touch; perhaps conscience tells her midway that she does not quite believe what she is saying. So is the self-conscious recognition of her "bitter burning brain" that interprets all things in a sort of distortion.—Observe, too, how instinctively

she turns to the peasant for sympathy in the strain of her emotion. It is his entrance, perhaps, which prevents Orestes from being swept away and revealing himself. The peasant's courage towards two armed men is striking, as well as his courtesy and his sanity. He is the one character in the play not somehow tainted with blood-madness.

P. 27, ll. 403, 409.]—Why does Electra send her husband to the Old Man? Not, I think, really for want of the food. It would have been easier to borrow (p. 12, l. 191) from the Chorus; and, besides, what the peasant says is no doubt true, that, if she liked, she could find “many a pleasant thing” in the house. I think she sends for the Old Man because he is the only person who would know Orestes (p. 21, l. 285). She is already, like the Leader (p. 26, l. 401), excited by hopes which she will not confess. This reading makes the next scene clearer also.

Pp. 28–30, ll. 432–487, O for the Ships of Troy.]—The two main Choric songs of this play are markedly what Aristotle calls ἐμβόλιμα, “things thrown in.” They have no effect upon the action, and form little more than musical “relief.” Not that they are positively irrelevant. Agamemnon is in our minds all through the play, and Agamemnon's glory is of course enhanced by the mention of Troy and the praises of his subordinate king, Achilles.

Thetis, the Nereid, or sea-maiden, was won to wife by Peleus. (He wrestled with her on the sea-shore, and never loosed hold, though she turned into divers strange beings—a lion, and fire, and water, and sea-beasts.) She bore him Achilles, and then, unable permanently to live with a mortal, went back beneath the sea. When Achilles was about to sail to Troy, she and her sister Nereids brought him divine armour, and guided his ships across the Aegean. The designs on Achilles' armour, as on Heracles' shield, form a fairly common topic of poetry.

The descriptions of the designs are mostly clear. Perseus with the Gorgon's head, guided by Hermês ; the Sun on a winged chariot, and stars about him ; two Sphinxes, holding as victims the men who had failed to answer the riddles which they sang ; and, on the breastplate, the Chimaera attacking Bellerophon's winged horse, Pêgâsus. The name Pêgâsus suggested to a Greek *πηγή*, "fountain ;" and the great spring of Pirênê, near Corinth, was made by Pêgâsus stamping on the rock.

Pp. 30-47.]—The Old Man, like other old family servants in Euripides—the extreme case is in the *Ion*—is absolutely and even morbidly devoted to his masters. Delightful in this first scene, he becomes a little horrible in the next, where they plot the murders ; not only ferocious himself, but, what seems worse, inclined to pet and enjoy the bloodthirstiness of his "little mistress."

Pp. 30-33, ll. 510-545.]—The Signs of Orestes. This scene, I think, has been greatly misunderstood by critics. In Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, which deals with the same subject as the *Electra*, the scene is at Agamemnon's tomb. Orestes lays his tress there in the prologue. Electra comes bringing libations, sees the hair, compares it with her own, finds that it is similar "wing for wing" (*ὁμόπτερος*—the same word as here), and guesses that it belongs to Orestes. She then measures the footprints, and finds one that is like her own, one not ; evidently Orestes and a fellow-traveller ! Orestes enters and announces himself ; she refuses to believe, until he shows her a "woven thing," perhaps the robe which he is wearing, which she recognises as the work of her own hand.

The same signs, described in one case by the same peculiar word, occur here. The Old Man mentions one after the other, and Electra refutes or rejects them. It has been thought therefore that

this scene was meant as an attack—a very weak and undignified attack—on Euripides' great master. No parallel for such an artistically ruinous proceeding is quoted from any Greek tragedy. And, apart from the improbability *à priori*, I do not think it even possible to read the scene in this sense. To my mind, Electra here rejects the signs not from reason, but from a sort of nervous terror. She dares not believe that Orestes has come; because, if it prove otherwise, the disappointment will be so terrible. As to both signs, the lock of hair and the footprints, her arguments may be good; but observe that she is afraid to make the comparison at all. And as to the footprint, she says there cannot be one, when the Old Man has just seen it! And, anyhow, she will not go to see it! Similarly as to the robe, she does her best to deny that she ever wove it, though she and the Old Man both remember it perfectly. She is fighting tremulously, with all her flagging strength, against the thing she longs for. The whole point of the scene requires that one ray of hope after another should be shown to Electra, and that she should passionately, blindly, reject them all. That is what Euripides wanted the signs for.

But why, it may be asked, did he adopt Aeschylus' signs, and even his peculiar word? Because, whether invented by Aeschylus or not, these signs were a canonical part of the story by the time Euripides wrote. Every one who knew the story of Orestes' return at all, knew of the hair and the footprint. Aristophanes in the *Clouds* (534 ff.) uses them proverbially, when he speaks of his comedy "recognising its brother's tress." It would have been frivolous to invent new ones. As a matter of fact, it seems probable that the signs are older than Aeschylus; neither they nor the word *ὁμόπτερος* particularly suit Aeschylus' purpose. (Cf. Dr. Verrall's introduction to

the *Libation-Bearers*.) They probably come from the old lyric poet, Stesichorus.

P. 43, l. 652, New-mothered of a Man-Child.]—Her true Man-Child, the Avenger whom they had sought to rob her of! This pitiless plan was suggested apparently by the sacrifice to the Nymphs (p. 40). "Weep my babe's low station" is of course ironical. The babe would set a seal on Electra's degradation to the peasant class, and so end the blood-feud, as far as she was concerned. Clytemnestra, longing for peace, must rejoice in Electra's degradation. Yet she has motherly feelings too, and in fact hardly knows what to think or do till she can consult Aegisthus (p. 71). Electra, it would seem, actually calculates upon these feelings, while despising them.

P. 45, l. 669, If but some man will guide me.]—A suggestion of the irresolution or melancholia that beset Orestes afterwards, alternating with furious action. (Cf. Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, Euripides' *Andromache* and *Orestes*.)

P. 45, l. 671, Zeus of my sires, &c.]—In this invocation, short and comparatively unmoving, one can see perhaps an effect of Aeschylus' play. In the *Libation-Bearers* the invocation of Agamemnon comprises 200 lines of extraordinarily eloquent poetry.

P. 47 ff., ll. 699 ff.]—The Golden Lamb. The theft of the Golden Lamb is treated as a story of the First Sin, after which all the world was changed and became the poor place that it now is. It was at least the First Sin in the blood-feud of this drama.

The story is not explicitly told. Apparently the magic lamb was brought by Pan from the gods, and given to Atreus as a special grace and a sign that he was the true king. His younger brother, Thyestes, helped by Atreus' wife, stole it and claimed to be king himself. So good was turned into evil, and love into hatred, and the stars shaken in their courses.

[It is rather curious that the Lamb should have such a special effect upon the heavens and the weather. It is the same in Plato (*Polit.* 268 ff.), and more definitely so in the treatise *De Astrologia*, attributed to Lucian, which says that the Golden Lamb is the constellation Aries, "The Ram." Hugo Winckler (*Weltanschauung des alten Orients*, pp. 30, 31) suggests that the story is a piece of Babylonian astronomy misunderstood. It seems that the vernal equinox, which is now moving from the Ram into the Fish, was in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. moving from the Bull into the Ram. Now the Bull, Marduk, was the special god of Babylon, and the time when he yielded his place to the Ram was also, as a matter of fact, the time of the decline of Babylon. The gradual advance of the Ram not only upset the calendar, and made all the seasons wrong; but seemed, since it coincided with the fall of the Great City, to upset the world in general! Of course Euripides would know nothing of this. He was apparently attracted to the Golden Lamb merely by the quaint beauty of the story.]

P. 50, l. 746, Thy brethren even now.]—Castor and Polydeuces, who were received into the stars after their death. See below, on l. 990.

P. 51, l. 757, That answer bids me die.]—Why? Because Orestes, if he won at all, would win by a surprise attack, and would send news instantly. A prolonged conflict, without a message, would mean that Orestes and Pylades were being overpowered. Of course she is wildly impatient.

P. 51, l. 765, Who art thou? I mistrust thee.]—Just as she mistrusted the Old Man's signs. See above, p. 89.

P. 52 ff., ll. 774 ff.]—Messenger's Speech. This speech, though swift and vivid, is less moving and also less sympathetic than most of the Messengers' Speeches. Less moving, because the slaying of

Aegisthus has little moral interest; it is merely a daring and dangerous exploit. Less sympathetic, because even here, in the first and comparatively blameless step of the blood-vengeance, Euripides makes us feel the treacherous side of it. A *δολοφονία*, a "slaying by guile," even at its best, remains rather an ugly thing.

P. 53, l. 793, Then quickly spake Orestes.]—If Orestes had washed with Aegisthus, he would have become his *xenos*, or guest, as much as if he had eaten his bread and salt. In that case the slaying would have been definitely a crime, a dishonourable act. Also, Aegisthus would have had the right to ask his name.—The unsuspectingness of Aegisthus is partly natural; it was not thus, alone and unarmed, that he expected Orestes to stand before him. Partly it seems like a heaven-sent blindness. Even the omens do not warn him, though no doubt in a moment more they would have done so.

P. 56, l. 878, With guile he hath slain.]—So the MSS. The Chorus have already a faint feeling, quickly suppressed, that there may be another side to Orestes' action. Most editors alter the text to mean "He hath slain these guileful ones."

P. 58, l. 900, It shames me, yet God knows I hunger sore.]—To treat the dead with respect was one of the special marks of a Greek as opposed to a barbarian. It is possible that the body of Aegisthus might legitimately have been refused burial, or even nailed on a cross as Orestes in a moment of excitement suggests. But to insult him lying dead would be a shock to all Greek feeling. ("Unholy is the voice of loud thanksgiving over slaughtered men," *Odyssey* xxii. 412.) Any excess of this kind, any violence towards the helpless, was apt to rouse "The sleeping wrath of the world." There was a Greek proverb, "Even an injured dog has his Erinyes"—i.e., his unseen guardian or avenger. It is interesting, though

not surprising, to hear that men had little love for Electra. The wonderful speech that follows, though to a conventional Greek perhaps the most outrageous thing of which she is guilty, shows best the inherent nobility of her character before years of misery had "killed her soul within."

P. 59, ll. 928 f., Being in falseness one, &c.]—The Greek here is very obscure and almost certainly corrupt.

P. 61, l. 964, 'Tis my mother comes.]—The reaction has already begun in Orestes. In the excitement and danger of killing his enemy he has shown coolness and courage, but now a work lies before him vastly more horrible, a little more treacherous, and with no element of daring to redeem it. Electra, on the other hand, has done nothing yet; she has merely tried, not very successfully, to revile the dead body, and her hate is unsatisfied. Besides, one sees all through the play that Aegisthus was a kind of odious stranger to her; it was the woman, her mother, who came close to her and whom she really hated.

P. 63, l. 979, Was it some fiend of Hell?]—The likeness to *Hamlet* is obvious. ("The spirit that I have seen May be the Devil." End of Act II.)

P. 63, l. 983, How shall it be then, the same stealthy blow? . . .]—He means, I think, "the same as that with which I have already murdered an unsuspecting man to-day," but Electra for her own purposes misinterprets him.

P. 64, l. 990, God's horsemen, stars without a stain.]—Cf. above, ll. 312, 746. Castor and Polydeuces were sons of Zeus and Leda, brothers of Helen, and half-brothers of Clytemnestra, whose father was the mortal Tyndareus. They lived as knights without reproach, and afterwards became stars and demigods. The story is told that originally Castor was mortal and Polydeuces immortal; but when Castor was fatally wounded Polydeuces prayed

that he might be allowed to give him half his immortality. The prayer was granted; and the two live as immortals, yet, in some mysterious way, knowing the taste of death. Unlike the common sinners and punishers of the rest of the play, these Heroes find their "glory" in saving men from peril and suffering, especially at sea, where they appear as the globes of light, called St. Elmo's fire, upon masts and yards.

Pp. 64-71, ll. 998 ff.]—Clytemnestra. "And what sort of woman is this doomed and 'evil' Queen? We know the majestic murderess of Aeschylus, so strong as to be actually beautiful, so fearless and unrepentant that one almost feels her to be right. One can imagine also another figure that would be theatrically effective—a 'sympathetic' sinner, beautiful and penitent, eager to redeem her sin by self-sacrifice. But Euripides gives us neither. Perhaps he believed in neither. It is a piteous and most real character that we have here, in this sad middle-aged woman, whose first words are an apology; controlling quickly her old fires, anxious to be as little hated as possible. She would even atone, one feels, if there were any safe way of atonement; but the consequences of her old actions are holding her, and she is bound to persist. . . . In her long speech it is scarcely to Electra that she is chiefly speaking; it is to the Chorus, perhaps to her own bondmaids; to any or all of the people whose shrinking so frets her." (*Independent Review, l.c.*)

P. 65, l. 1011, Cast his child away.]—The Greek fleet assembled for Troy was held by contrary winds at Aulis, in the Straits of Euboea, and the whole expedition was in danger of breaking up. The prophets demanded a human sacrifice, and Agamemnon gave his own daughter, Iphigenia. He induced Clytemnestra to send her to him, by the pretext that Achilles had asked for her in marriage.

P. 66, l. 1046, Which led me to the men he hated.]—It made Clytemnestra's crime worse, that her accomplice was the blood-foe.

Pp. 65–68. As elsewhere in Euripides, these two speeches leave the matter undecided. He does not attempt to argue the case out. He gives us a flash of light, as it were, upon Clytemnestra's mind and then upon Electra's. Each believes what she is saying, and neither understands the whole truth. It is clear that Clytemnestra, being left for ten years utterly alone, and having perhaps something of Helen's temperament about her, naturally fell in love with the Lord of a neighbouring castle; and having once committed herself, had no way of saving her life except by killing her husband, and afterwards either killing or keeping strict watch upon Orestes and Electra. Aegisthus, of course, was deliberately plotting to carry out his blood-feud and to win a great kingdom.

P. 72, l. 1156, For the flying heart too fond.]—The text is doubtful, but this seems to be the literal translation, and the reference to Clytemnestra is intelligible enough.

P. 73, l. 1157, The giants' cloud-capped ring.]—The great walls of Mycenae, built by the Cyclopes; cf. *Trojan Women*, p. 64, "Where the towers of the giants shine O'er Argos cloudily."

P. 75, l. 1201, Back, back in the wind and rain.]—The only explicit moral judgment of the Chorus; cf. note on l. 878.

P. 77, l. 1225, I touched with my hand thy sword.]—*i.e.*, Electra dropped her own sword in horror, then in a revulsion of feeling laid her hand upon Orestes' sword—out of generosity, that he might not bear his guilt alone.

P. 78, l. 1241, An Argive ship.]—This may have been the ship of Menelaus, which was brought to Argos by Castor and Polydeuces, see l. 1278, *Helena*

1663. The ships labouring in the "Sicilian sea" (p. 82, l. 1347) must have suggested to the audience the ships of the great expedition against Sicily, then drawing near to its destruction. The Athenian fleet was destroyed early in September 413 B.C.: this play was probably produced in the spring of the same year, at which time the last reinforcements were being sent out.

P. 78, l. 1249.]—Marriage of Pylades and Electra. A good example of the essentially historic nature of Greek tragedy. No one would have invented a marriage between Electra and Pylades for the purposes of this play. It is even a little disturbing. But it is here, because it was a fixed fact in the tradition (cf. *Iphigenia in Tauris*, l. 915 ff.), and could not be ignored. Doubtless there were people living who claimed descent from Pylades and Electra.

P. 79, l. 1253, Scourge thee as a burning wheel.]—At certain feasts a big wheel soaked in some inflammable resin or tar was set fire to and rolled down a mountain.

P. 79, l. 1258, There is a hill in Athens.]—The great fame of the Areopagus as a tribunal for man-slaying (see Aeschylus' *Eumenides*) cannot have been due merely to its incorruptibility. Hardly any Athenian tribunal was corruptible. But the Areopagus in very ancient times seems to have superseded the early systems of "blood-feud" or "blood-debt" by a humane and rational system of law, taking account of intention, provocation, and the varying degrees of guilt. The Erinyes, being the old Pelasgian avengers of blood, now superseded, have their dwelling in a cavern underneath the Areopagus.

P. 80, ll. 1276 ff.]—The graves of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra actually existed in Argos (Paus. ii. 16, 7). They form, so to speak, the concrete material fact round which the legend of this play circles (cf. Ridgeway in *Hellenic Journal*, xxiv. p. xxxix.).

P. 80, l. 1280.]—Helen. The story here adumbrated is taken from Stesichorus, and forms the plot of Euripides' play *Helena* (cf. Herodotus, ii. 113 ff.).

P. 80, l. 1295, I also, sons of Tyndareus.]—Observe that Electra claims the gods as cousins (cf. p. 22, l. 313), addressing them by the name of their mortal father. The Chorus has called them "sons of Zeus." In the same spirit she faces the gods, complains, and even argues, while Orestes never raises his eyes to them.

P. 80, l. 1300.]—Kêres. The death-spirits that flutter over our heads, as Homer says, "innumerable, whom no man can fly nor hide from."

P. 82, l. 1329, Yea, our peace is riven by the strange pain of these that die.]—Cf. the attitude of Artemis at the end of the *Hippolytus*. Sometimes Euripides introduces gods whose peace is not riven, but then they are always hateful. (Cf. Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus*, Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, Athena in the *Trojan Women*.)

P. 82, l. 1336, O faithful unto death.]—This is the last word we hear of Electra, and it is interesting. With all her unlovely qualities it remains true that she was faithful—faithful to the dead and the absent, and to what she looked upon as a fearful duty.

Additional Note on the presence of the Argive women during the plot against the King and Queen. (Cf. especially p. 19, l. 272, These women hear us.)—It would seem to us almost mad to speak so freely before the women. But one must observe: 1. Stasis, or civil enmity, ran very high in Greece, and these women were of the party that hated Aegisthus. 2. There runs all through Euripides a very strong conception of the cohesiveness of women, their secretiveness, and their faithfulness to one another. Medea, Iphigenia, and Creusa, for instance, trust

their women friends with secrets involving life and death, and the secrets are kept. On the other hand, when a man—Xuthus in the *Ion*—tells the Chorus women a secret, they promptly and with great courage betray him. Aristophanes leaves the same impression; and so do many incidents in Greek history. Cf. the murders plotted by the Athenian women (Hdt. v. 87), and both by and against the Lemnian women (Hdt. vi. 138). The subject is a large one, but I would observe: 1. Athenian women were kept as a rule very much together, and apart from men. 2. At the time of the great invasions the women of a community must often have been of different race from the men; and this may have started a tradition of behaviour. 3. Members of a subject (or disaffected) nation have generally this cohesiveness: in Ireland, Poland, and parts of Turkey the details of a political crime will, it is said, be known to a whole country side, but not a whisper come to the authorities.

Of course the mere mechanical fact that the Chorus had to be present on the stage counts for something. It saved the dramatist trouble to make his heroine confide in the Chorus. But I do not think Euripides would have used this situation so often unless it had seemed to him both true to life and dramatically interesting.

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